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Meditate on these Things

Epicurus's *Letter to Menoikeus*

A New Translation with Commentary

Text Primary Source: Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, Book X.121-135
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Introduction

What is the "Letter to Menoikeus"? The Letter to Menoikeus is one of the few surviving complete texts written by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (Ἐπίκουρος) who lived over 23 centuries ago from 341 to 270 BCE. The Letter provides a summary of the ethical teaching of the "master-builder of happiness" himself to his student Menoikeus. Along with the Letters to Herodotus, Pythocles, and Idomeneus enshrined in Diogenes Laërtius's *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, Book X, the Letter to Menoikeus was, until very recently, one of the only full-length texts available to us from the hand of Epicurus. Since their rediscovery in 1750 and scholarly examination up to the present, the scrolls buried by Vesuvius at the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum have also provided substantial portions of Epicurus's *On Nature* and other works by early Epicurean authors including the poet and philosopher Philodemus. However, much of what we know from those early generations of Epicureans is fragmentary or contained in quotes from unreliable or even hostile commentators. In light of all this, Epicurus's letter to Menoikeus is an invaluable resource that resonates across the millennia with practical advice for leading a pleasurable life.

One of the goals of this new translation and commentary is to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the context and an appreciation of the nuanced meaning of the original Greek text. The question, however, is what the phrase "the original Greek text" actually means. The letter has survived to the present day by being passed down from Epicurus's time in the 3rd century BCE through Diogenes Laertius's decision 600 years later to include it in his book then through existing manuscripts from six to nine centuries after that, and, finally, through the translation and commentaries of scholars from the 18th to the 21st centuries. It's not a hopeless situation by any means, but it's not straightforward. Through reliance on existing scholarship and comparative analysis of texts, we can arrive at a high probability of reading the actual words written by Epicurus's hand as long as we accept some "wiggle room" for the occasional missing fragment or scribal transcription error.

As the primary text from which to work, I have decided to use the Greek text from Cyril Bailey in his *Epicurus: The Extant Remains*, first published in 1926. Building on the scholarship of Hermann Usener and his *Epicurea* (1887) as well as others, Bailey does an excellent job in laying out the problems of getting at Epicurus's original text. Bailey also provides a list of the 12 oldest surviving manuscripts of Diogenes Laertius's work dating from the 12th to the 16th century CE that can be consulted to reconstruct the letter. The amazing benefit we have in the 21st century is that some of the most important manuscripts have been digitized and are available to us online. The six manuscripts listed by Bailey as the most significant and "representing a careful copying" are:

- codex Borbonicus Neapolitanus gr. iii B. 29 (12th c) known as B
- codex Parisinus gr. 1759 (14th c.) known as P

- <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8470453h/f497.item> (the letter begins four lines from the bottom of folio 243r)
- codex Parisinus gr. I758 (14th or 15th c.) known as Q
 - <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b107231783/f203.item> (letter starts 16 lines down on left folio on page number 148)
- codex Constantinopolitanus Veteris Serail. (14th or 15th c.) known as Co
- codex Laurentianus LXIX. 35 (14th c.) known as H
 - <http://mss.bmlonline.it/Catalogo.aspx?Shelfmark=Plut.69.35>
 - Plut.69.35 is listed in the online catalog as coming from the 12th century, so I am unsure if it is H or something else. However, its inclusion in the Laurentian Library and its shelfmark 69.35 (i.e., LXIX. 35) leads me to believe it is. I'm not sure why Bailey gives it a date of 14th century.
- codex Vaticanus gr. 140 (14th c.) known as W
 - https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.140 (letter begins 13 lines down on right folio 177)

The sections into which the letter (and all of Diogenes Laertius's work) has been divided by scholars seem to correspond very roughly to possible pages in one of the manuscripts. However, I have not been able to determine which manuscript, and they do not line up exactly with any of the digitized ones I was able to examine. For better or worse, I have decided to use the term "verse" to refer to these sections. This should in no way be taken to have any religious or poetic connotation. It is merely a convenient device to break up our project. In fact, the "verses" sometimes themselves break up natural thoughts and even sentences. Even so, we will maintain the verses for practical purposes. In addition to Bailey's' Greek, we will also be referring, from time to time for comparison, to other English translations and to our available digitized manuscripts like the Oxford manuscript of Diogenes's work (Arundel MS 531) available online via the British Museum¹ and those available through the Princeton Digitized Greek Manuscripts online index² including the 12th-century CE Plut.69.35³ in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Digital Repository.

It is hoped that this exploration will encourage the reader to create their own translation or paraphrase of Epicurus's letter to Menoikeus as faithful as possible to the original text and to make the work more personal, meaningful, and approachable for themselves.

In fact, that's how this all started. This all grew out of my own notes to better understand the original text and the words written centuries ago. I freely admit I am an ancient Greek autodidact and amateur; but an amateur in the truest sense: doing something for the love of it. Maybe a better word to describe my connection to the language is dilettante (with the original,

¹ http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Arundel_MS_531

² <https://library.princeton.edu/byzantine/subject-name/diogenes-laertius>

³ <http://mss.bmlonline.it/Catalogo.aspx?Shelfmark=Plut.69.35>

non-pejorative, *literal* definition of the word again) meaning "devoted amateur" or "one who *delights* in a particular subject." That word strikes me as more Epicurean. I take delight in digging into the texts, dissecting them, and getting lost in comparing and contrasting definitions and parsing sentences. However, as an amateur and novice, I also freely admit that you may come across an incorrect grammar point or detail in my translation or commentary. I have done my best to verify everything and to provide my thought processes for the reader to follow along, but ancient Greek is a complex and intricate language full of subtle distinctions. Especially when it comes to verbs. See verse 131 for a digression into the details of the subjunctive! However, that's why I'm doing this in the first place: Because there are so many subtle distinctions that get buried in a translation, we need to investigate the original words of the text itself and not rely on individual interpretations. I have found this exploration extremely rewarding, and my hope is you will, too. Hence my decision to share my notes, to share what I have learned, and to provide an opportunity to learn from others from feedback on this work. If there is any feedback, I hope to revise this project in the future to correct any errors and to keep sharpening my own understanding of this fundamental text from Epicurus and to sharing that understanding with fellow members of the Garden.

To truly understand Epicurus, one must examine his words - his original words in Greek. Too many times, people may be satisfied with one English translation over another. They may like the sound of one turn of phrase and stick to that translator's work. If so, you are reading Epicurus's words "through a glass, darkly" to borrow a phrase from another famous letter⁴ instead of "face to face."

Philodemus himself is on record as advocating that Epicureans needed to study the works of Epicurus to really understand the philosophy. We are following in that tradition. Philodemus wrote:

ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐγνωσμένος ἢ καὶ διυστορημένος ὑπ' ἡμῶν, ὃς καὶ φησι εἶν[α]ι ὁ γνήσιος ἀναγνώ[σ]της ἐπὶ γραφᾶς [ἐγλεκ]τὰς κα[ὶ] πλ[ή]θη συγγρα[μμ]άτων, κἂν βάληι [γ]ε [κα]λῶς, ἀνεῖληφε πολ[λὰ]ς ἐγλογὰς καὶ τῶν μ[ε]ν ἐπὶ μέρους διανο[η]μάτων ἀπειρότατός ἐστιν. ἃ δὲ προστάττεται ποιεῖν, ἐπὶ κεφάλαι[α] βλέ[πει], καθάπερ ὃν λ[έ]γου]σιν ἐκ βυβλίου κυβ[ερνήτ]ην καὶ διὰ παντ[ός] - -]

He who claims to know us and to be instructed by us, who claims to be a genuine reader of various writings and of complete books, even if he says something correctly, he has only memorized various quotations and does not know the multitude of our thoughts. What he has to

⁴ Paul, I Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." βλέπομεν γὰρ ἀρτι δι' εἰσοπτροῦ ἐν αἰνιγματι τότε δε προσωπον προς προσωπον ἀρτι γινωσκω ἐκ μέρους τότε δε ἐπιγινωσσομαι καθως και ἐπεγινωσθην

*do, he looks up in summaries, like people who believe that they [can learn to be] steersman from books and [can cross every ocean].*⁵

and also...

ἀλλὰ τὸ σχετλιώτατο[ν] ἐκεῖν' ἐστὶν [ἐ]πὶ τοῖς πλείοσιν τῶν Ἐπικουρείων ὁ τὴν ἐν τοῖς βιβλί[ο]ις ἀ[νε]νεργησίαν ἀπαραίτητο[ν] ποιεῖ...]
*but the most shocking thing of most Epicureans is the unforgivable inactivity in regards to the books...*⁶

So, in the spirit of the classical Epicureans and at the urging of Philodemus, we will be active in regards to the books, or at least one of Epicurus's surviving letters.

We will literally be taking the work apart verse by verse, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase, and word by word, before putting all the elements back together. If you would like an overview first, please feel free to take a look at my full new translation below which we'll be dissecting in detail. I have done my best to substantiate all my decisions.

One problem with translations is that the translator must choose only one word in the target language when translating a passage. I have not done that, and, instead, have included several English words or a phrase where the original has a single word. Words in a language come with their own connotations and shades of meaning. By starting with the original words of Epicurus, the reader can begin to appreciate the connotations and shades of meaning inherent in the original Greek and begin to decide for themselves how this translates into English and which scholarly translations best echo the flavor of the original as the reader comes to understand it.

The following format will be used:

First, the original ancient Greek text will be presented. Definitions are then provided with commentary - sometimes detailed or extensive commentary. Each verse's section will end with a complete, literal translation using what was presented in that section.

Readers should be familiar with grammatical terms of number, case, function (e.g., singular, plural; accusative, genitive; preposition, article) as these will be referenced throughout.

⁵ Blue Networks: Social Networks in the Pre-Modern Mediterranean.
<http://mediterraneanetworks.weebly.com/exclusive-philosophy-philodemus-criteria-for-epicureans.html>
Source: Phil. PHerc. 1005 Col. 4.2-18.

⁶ Source: Phil. PHerc. 1005 col. 14.13-18.

Although some transliterated words are included, I eventually decided against including a transliteration of every word and phrase from Greek to Roman letters. Readers are highly encouraged to, at least, endeavor to read the Greek alphabet well enough to sound out the Greek letters and to be able to pronounce Greek words for themselves. Many letter forms will be familiar to English speakers: α a, β B, δ d, τ t, etc. Others are very different: θ th, γ g, ψ ps, ζ z, etc. But not all of them are pronounced as one would in English, so caution is advised. Even a little study of ancient Greek pronunciation will go a long way and yield confidence. Try not to settle for the tempting mishmash that is Erasmian pronunciation! Finding an historically accurate pronunciation that you like (even if you use modern Greek phonology) will connect you to the classical Epicureans more closely. I have been gravitating toward the system proposed by W.S. Allen in his *Vox Graeca* but am also attracted to Luke Ranieri's historical Lucian pronunciation. There's also the reconstructed Koine system presented by Booth. And so on. Diving into the rabbit hole of ancient Greek phonetics may be daunting, but that journey can be quite rewarding.⁷

Sources

As mentioned above, I will be using the standard Greek text in Cyril Bailey's *Epicurus: The Extant Remains*,⁸ first published in 1926. The definitions we will be using come primarily from Liddell, Scott, and Jones' *A Greek-English Lexicon* (LSJ) which is available online at the Perseus Digital Library.⁹ I also made extensive use of *Wiktionary*¹⁰ as a tool to navigate to LSJ and other word study tools, again primarily at the Perseus Digital Library. I have also used other translations for comparison while refining my own, and these are linked at the end as an appendix for the reader's reference.

I hope you take pleasure in this deep dive into Epicurus's correspondence with his student, whether you see that literally as his student Menoikeus or figuratively as you yourself as his student connecting over the millennia.

Let's begin!

⁷ For those interested in gaining experience pronouncing Greek as it was spoken during our time period in question, a great resource is Luke Ranieri's materials online at <https://lukeraniei.com/> including his in-depth phonology study resulting in his proposed Lucian Pronunciation as well as his Polymathy and Scorpio Martianus YouTube channels.

⁸ [Epicurus The Extant Remains Bailey Oxford 1926 Optimized For Greek On Left : Cyril Bailey : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

⁹ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057>

¹⁰ <https://en.wiktionary.org/>

Source Text

We begin with a full exposition of what we're working with: Epicurus's Letter to Menoikeus in the original Greek as presented in Cyril Bailey's *Epicurus: The Extant Remains* (1926). My goal in starting here is two-fold. First, these are the words we'll be working with, so it behooves us to present them as our source text here at the start. Second, even if you don't know any ancient Greek, I highly encourage you to take a minute and at least skim this text. As I mentioned in the introduction, students of Epicurus have a vested interest in at least being able to identify Greek letters and being able to sound out Greek words in a historically accurate pronunciation. At this time, you don't have to do that. Just look over the text. Begin to spot some re-occurring words and parts of words like θάνατον, καλῶς, ἀγαθόν, and θεός. Soon enough, you'll discover the meanings behind those assemblages of unfamiliar letters. For now, accustom yourself to this new alphabet if it is new.

You'll also notice the inline "verse" notations. You can click on those and go directly to that section for commentary on that verse.

Epicurus's Letter to Menoikeus as presented by Cyril Bailey

[\[121\]](#) Ἐπίκουρος Μενοικεῖ χαίρειν.

[\[122\]](#) Μῆτε νέος τις ὦν μελλέτω φιλοσοφεῖν, μήτε γέρον ὑπάρχων κοπιάτω φιλοσοφῶν. οὔτε γὰρ ἄωρος οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν οὔτε πάρωρος πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν ὑγιαῖνον. ὁ δὲ λέγων ἢ μήπω τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπάρχειν ἢ παρεληλυθέναι τὴν ὥραν ὁμοίός ἐστι τῷ λέγοντι πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἢ μήπω παρεῖναι τὴν ὥραν ἢ μηκέτ' εἶναι. ὥστε φιλοσοφητέον καὶ νέῳ καὶ γέροντι, τῷ μὲν ὅπως γηράσκων νεάζῃ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς διὰ τὴν χάριν τῶν γεγονότων, τῷ δ' ὅπως νέος ἅμα καὶ παλαιὸς ἦ διὰ τὴν ἀφοβίαν τῶν μελλόντων. μελετᾷν οὖν χρὴ τὰ ποιοῦντα τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν, εἴ περ παρούσης μὲν αὐτῆς πάντα ἔχομεν, ἀπούσης δὲ πάντα πράττομεν εἰς τὸ ταύτην ἔχειν.

[\[123\]](#) Ἄ δέ σοι συνεχῶς παρήγγελλον, ταῦτα καὶ πράττε καὶ μελέτα, στοιχεῖα τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν ταῦτ' εἶναι διαλαμβάνων. πρῶτον μὲν τὸν θεὸν ζῶν ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον νομίζων, ὡς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη, μηθὲν μήτε τῆς ἀφθαρσίας ἀλλότριον μήτε τῆς μακαριότητος ἀνοίκειον αὐτῷ πρόσαπτε· πᾶν δὲ τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετα ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτὸν δόξαζε. θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσὶν· ἐναργὴς γὰρ αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ γνῶσις. οἷους δ' αὐτοὺς <οἱ> πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν, οὐκ εἰσὶν· οὐ γὰρ φυλάττουσιν αὐτοὺς οἷους νοοῦσιν. ἀσεβὴς δὲ οὐχ ὁ τοὺς τῶν πολλῶν θεοὺς ἀναιρῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ τὰς τῶν πολλῶν δόξας θεοῖς προσάπτων. [\[124\]](#) οὐ γὰρ προλήψεις εἰσὶν ἀλλ' ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς αἱ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις, ἔνθεν αἱ μέγιστα βλάβαι τε τοῖς κακοῖς ἐκ θεῶν ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλειαι <τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς>. ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκειούμενοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς τοὺς ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται, πᾶν τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον ὡς ἀλλότριον νομίζοντες.

Συνέθιζε δὲ ἐν τῷ νομίζειν μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι τὸν θάνατον· ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν ἐν αἰσθήσει· στερήσις δὲ ἐστὶν αἰσθήσεως ὁ θάνατος. ὁθεν γινώσις ὀρθὴ τοῦ μηθὲν εἶναι πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὸν θάνατον ἀπολαυστὸν ποιεῖ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς θνητόν, οὐκ ἄπειρον προστιθεῖσα χρόνον, ἀλλὰ τὸν τῆς ἀθανασίας ἀφελομένη πόθον. [125] οὐθὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ζῆν δεινὸν τῷ κατειληφότι γνησίως τὸ μηθὲν ὑπάρχειν ἐν τῷ μὴ ζῆν δεινόν. ὥστε μάταιος ὁ λέγων δεδιέναι τὸν θάνατον οὐχ ὅτι λυπήσει παρών, ἀλλ' ὅτι λυπεῖ μέλλον. ὁ γὰρ παρὸν οὐκ ἐνοχλεῖ, προσδοκώμενον κενῶς λυπεῖ. τὸ φρικωδέστατον οὖν τῶν κακῶν ὁ θάνατος οὐθὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἐπειδήπερ ὅταν μὲν ἡμεῖς ὦμεν, ὁ θάνατος οὐ πάρεστιν· ὅταν δ' ὁ θάνατος παρῇ, τόθ' ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμέν. οὔτε οὖν πρὸς τοὺς ζῶντάς ἐστιν οὔτε πρὸς τοὺς τετελευτηκότας, ἐπειδήπερ περὶ οὓς μὲν οὐκ ἐστιν, οἱ δ' οὐκέτι εἰσίν.

Ἀλλ' οἱ πολλοὶ τὸν θάνατον ὅτε μὲν ὡς μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν φεύγουσιν, ὅτε δὲ ὡς ἀνάπαυσιν τῶν ἐν τῷ ζῆν <κακῶν ποθοῦσιν. (Note: Some scholars choose αἰροῦνται as the last word here. See Commentary for 125j.) [126] ὁ δὲ σοφὸς οὔτε παραιτεῖται τὸ ζῆν> οὔτε φοβεῖται τὸ μὴ ζῆν· οὔτε γὰρ αὐτῷ προσίσταται τὸ ζῆν οὔτε δοξάζεται κακὸν εἶναι τὸ μὴ ζῆν. ὥσπερ δὲ σιτίον οὐ τὸ πλεῖον πάντως ἀλλὰ τὸν ἥδιστον αἰρεῖται, οὕτω καὶ χρόνον οὐ τὸν μήκιστον ἀλλὰ τὸν ἥδιστον καρπίζεται.

Ὁ δὲ παραγγέλλων τὸν μὲν νέον καλῶς ζῆν, τὸν δὲ γέροντα καλῶς καταστρέφειν εὐήθης ἐστὶν οὐ μόνον διὰ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς ἀσπαστόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὸ τὴν αὐτὴν εἶναι μελέτην τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν καὶ τοῦ καλῶς ἀποθνήσκειν. πολὺ δὲ χεῖρων καὶ ὁ λέγων καλὸν μὲν μὴ φῦναι,

Φύντα δ' ὅπως ὥκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι.

[127] Εἰ μὲν γὰρ πεποιθὼς τοῦτο φησι, πῶς οὐκ ἀπέρχεται τοῦ ζῆν; ἐν ἐτοίμῳ γὰρ αὐτῷ τοῦτ' ἐστὶν, εἰ περ ἦν βεβουλευμένον αὐτῷ βεβαίως· εἰ δὲ μωκώμενος, μάταιος ἐν τοῖς οὐκ ἐπιδεχομένοις.

Μνημονευτέον δὲ ὡς τὸ μέλλον οὔτε ἡμέτερον οὔτε πάντως οὐχ ἡμέτερον, ἵνα μήτε πάντως προσμένωμεν ὡς ἐσόμενον μήτε ἀπελπίζωμεν ὡς πάντως οὐκ ἐσόμενον.

Ἀναλογιστέον δὲ ὡς τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι φυσικαί, αἱ δὲ κεναί, καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν αἱ μὲν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μόνον· τῶν δ' ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν. [128] τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανὴς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἵρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν <τῆς ψυχῆς> ἀταραξίαν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἐστὶ τέλος. τούτου γὰρ χάριν πάντα πράττομεν, ὅπως μήτε ἀλγῶμεν μήτε ταρβῶμεν. ὅταν δ' ἅπαξ τοῦτο περὶ ἡμᾶς γένηται, λύεται πᾶς ὁ τῆς ψυχῆς χειμὼν, οὐκ ἔχοντος τοῦ ζῶου βαδίζειν ὡς πρὸς ἐνδέον τι καὶ ζητεῖν ἕτερον ὃ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀγαθὸν συμπληρωθήσεται. τότε γὰρ ἡδονῆς χρεῖαν ἔχομεν, ὅταν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ παρῆναι τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλγῶμεν· <ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἀλγῶμεν>, οὐκέτι τῆς ἡδονῆς δεόμεθα. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν. [129] ταύτην γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἔγνωμεν, καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην καταντῶμεν ὡς κανόνι τῷ πάθει πᾶν ἀγαθὸν κρίνοντες.

Καὶ ἐπεὶ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο καὶ σύμφυτον, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ οὐ πᾶσαν ἡδονὴν αἰρούμεθα, ἀλλ' ἐστὶν ὅτε πολλὰς ἡδονὰς ὑπερβαίνομεν, ὅταν πλεῖον ἡμῖν τὸ δυσχερὲς ἐκ τούτων ἔπηται· καὶ πολλὰς ἀλγηδόνας ἡδονῶν κρεῖττους νομίζομεν, ἐπειδὴν μείζων ἡμῖν ἡδονὴ παρακολουθῇ

πολὺν χρόνον ὑπομείνασι τὰς ἀλγηδόνας. πᾶσα οὖν ἡδονὴ διὰ τὸ φύσιν ἔχειν οἰκείαν ἀγαθόν, οὐ πᾶσα μέντοι αἰρετὴ· καθάπερ καὶ ἀλγηδὼν πᾶσα κακόν, οὐ πᾶσα δὲ αἰεὶ φευκτὴ πεφυκυῖα. [130] τῇ μέντοι συμμετρήσει καὶ συμφερόντων καὶ ἀσυμφόρων βλέπει ταῦτα πάντα κρίνειν καθήκει. χρώμεθα γὰρ τῷ μὲν ἀγαθῷ κατὰ τινὰς χρόνους ὡς κακῷ, τῷ δὲ κακῷ τοῦμπαλιν ὡς ἀγαθῷ.

Καὶ τὴν αὐτάρκειαν δὲ ἀγαθὸν μέγα νομίζομεν, οὐχ ἵνα πάντως τοῖς ὀλίγοις χρώμεθα, ἀλλ' ὅπως ἐὰν μὴ ἔχωμεν τὰ πολλά, τοῖς ὀλίγοις χρώμεθα, πεπεισμένοι γνησίως ὅτι ἥδιστα πολυτελείας ἀπολαύουσιν οἱ ἥκιστα ταύτης δεόμενοι, καὶ ὅτι τὸ μὲν φυσικὸν πᾶν εὐπόριστόν ἐστι, τὸ δὲ κενὸν δυσπόριστον. οἱ τε λιτοὶ χυλοὶ ἴσην πολυτελεῖ διαίτη τὴν ἡδονὴν ἐπιφέρουσιν, ὅταν ἅπαν τὸ ἀλγοῦν κατ' ἐνδεῖαν ἐξαιρεθῇ· [131] καὶ μᾶζα καὶ ὕδωρ τὴν ἀκροτάτην ἀποδίδωσιν ἡδονήν, ἐπειδὴ ἐνδέων τις αὐτὰ προσενέγκηται. τὸ συνεθίζειν οὖν ἐν ταῖς ἀπλαῖς καὶ οὐ πολυτελέσι διαίταις καὶ ὑγιείας ἐστὶ συμπληρωτικὸν καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἀναγκαίαις τοῦ βίου χρήσεις ἄοκνον ποιεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ τοῖς πολυτελέσιν ἐκ διαλειμμάτων προσερχομένους κρεῖττον ἡμᾶς διατίθησι καὶ πρὸς τὴν τύχην ἀφόβους παρασκευάζει.

Ὅταν οὖν λέγωμεν ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν, οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν, ὡς τινες ἀγνοοῦντες καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντες ἢ κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι νομίζουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μῆτε ἀλγεῖν κατὰ σῶμα μῆτε ταράττεσθαι κατὰ ψυχὴν· [132] οὐ γὰρ πότοι καὶ κῶμοι συνείροντες οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παιδῶν καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, ὅσα φέρει πολυτελὴς τράπεζα, τὸν ἡδὺν γεννᾷ βίον, ἀλλὰ νήφων λογισμὸς καὶ τὰς αἰτίας ἐξερευνῶν πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ τὰς δόξας ἐξελαύνων ἐξ ὧν πλεῖστος τὰς ψυχὰς καταλαμβάνει θόρυβος.

Τούτων δὲ πάντων ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν φρόνησις. διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφίας τιμιώτερον ὑπάρχει φρόνησις, ἐξ ἧς αἱ λοιπαὶ πᾶσαι πεφύκασιν ἀρεταί, διδάσκουσα ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ζῆν ἄνευ τοῦ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως <οὐδὲ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως> ἄνευ τοῦ ἡδέως. συμπεφύκασι γὰρ αἱ ἀρεταὶ τῷ ζῆν ἡδέως, καὶ τὸ ζῆν ἡδέως τούτων ἐστὶν ἀχώριστον. [133] ἐπεὶ τίνα νομίζεις εἶναι κρεῖττονα τοῦ καὶ περὶ θεῶν ὅσια δοξάζοντος καὶ περὶ θανάτου διὰ παντὸς ἀφόβως ἔχοντος καὶ τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἐπιλελογισμένου τέλος, καὶ τὸ μὲν τῶν ἀγαθῶν πέρας ὡς ἔστιν εὐσυμπλήρωτόν τε καὶ εὐπόριστον διαλαμβάνοντος, τὸ δὲ τῶν κακῶν ὡς ἢ χρόνους ἢ πόνους ἔχει βραχεῖς, τὴν δὲ ὑπὸ τινων δεσπότην εἰσαγομένην πάντων ἐγγελῶντος <εἰμαρμένην; * * * * ὧν ἃ μὲν κατ' ἀνάγκην γίνεται>, ἃ δὲ ἀπὸ τύχης, ἃ δὲ παρ' ἡμᾶς διὰ τὸ τὴν μὲν ἀνάγκην ἀνυπεύθυνον εἶναι, τὴν δὲ τύχην ἄστατον ὄραν, τὸ δὲ παρ' ἡμᾶς ἀδέσποτον, ὃ καὶ τὸ μεμπτόν καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον παρακολουθεῖν πέφυκεν. [134] ('ἐπεὶ κρεῖττον ἦν τῷ περὶ θεῶν μύθῳ κατακολουθεῖν ἢ τῇ τῶν φυσικῶν εἰμαρμένην δουλεύειν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐλπίδα παραιτήσεως ὑπογράφει θεῶν διὰ τιμῆς, ἡ δὲ ἀπαραίτητον ἔχει τὴν ἀνάγκην)· τὴν δὲ τύχην οὔτε θεόν, ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν, ὑπολαμβάνοντος (οὐθὲν γὰρ ἀτάκτως θεῷ πράττεται) οὔτε <πάντων> ἀβέβαιον αἰτίαν (<οὐκ> οἶται μὲν γὰρ ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακὸν ἐκ ταύτης πρὸς τὸ μακαρίως ζῆν ἀνθρώποις δίδοσθαι, ἀρχὰς μέντοι μεγάλων ἀγαθῶν ἢ κακῶν ὑπὸ ταύτης χορηγεῖσθαι), [135] κρεῖττον εἶναι νομίζει εὐλογίστεως ἀτυχεῖν ἢ ἀλογίστεως εὐτυχεῖν (βέλτιον γὰρ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι τὸ καλῶς κριθέν <σφαλῆναι μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ κακῶς κριθέν> ὀρθωθῆναι διὰ ταύτην).

Ταῦτα οὖν καὶ τὰ τούτοις συγγενῇ μελέτα πρὸς σεαυτὸν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς πρὸς <τε>
τὸν ὅμοιον σεαυτῷ, καὶ οὐδέποτε οὐθ' ὕπαρ οὐτ' ὄναρ διαταραχθήσῃ, ζήσεις δὲ ὡς θεὸς ἐν
ἀνθρώποις. οὐθὲν γὰρ ἔοικε θνητῷ ζῶν ζῶν ἄνθρωπος ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς.

Epicurus's Letter to Menoikeus: A New Translation

Below is my full translation of Epicurus's letter to Menoikeus with inline links to the verse's detailed commentary. You will find my translation rather "clunky" in places. This is deliberate. I have attempted to be as literal as possible to show repetition in the original Greek or turns of phrase which, when translated literally into English, can sound awkward. I need to emphasize that Epicurus's Greek is NOT awkward. It is my translation of the Greek. In keeping a literal translation style, I want to encourage others to take the literal translation and my commentary and to make their own paraphrases and translations that are meaningful to them but to keep the literal meaning of the text always firmly in mind.

I have also stuck to using certain translation tropes, especially the use of "on the one hand... on the other hand..." to translate the common **μὲν... δὲ...** to call attention to the frequent use of this grammatical device. Other, more fluid paraphrases are encouraged to make the text flow more narratively.

I hope you enjoy this translation as well as the accompanying commentary and begin to make the letter speak to you directly from the ancient words themselves, not filtered through someone else's translation... even mine.

[\[121\]](#) Epicurus to Menoikeus, Joyful greetings!

[\[122\]](#) Neither must one who is young delay in loving and pursuing wisdom; nor should one who is old grow weary of loving and pursuing wisdom; because it is neither out of season nor untimely for the health of the *psykhē*. And one who says either the season to love and practice wisdom is not yet arrived or the season has passed by is like someone who is saying either the proper time has not arrived or is no more for *eudaimonia*. Therefore, both the young and old must love and pursue wisdom. On the one hand, the old can be young by means of gratitude for the pleasures which have happened; on the other hand, the young can be as if they are old in years by means of the fearlessness of facing what is intended to be done or what is to come. You must study and meditate upon that which produces *eudaimonia*. For if indeed that is present, we have everything; if that is not present, we do anything to have it.

[\[123\]](#) And, Menoikeus, I was continuously exhorting you to practice, to study, and to meditate on those things which I state distinctly to be the essential elements of a noble, beautiful, and virtuous life. First, believe that the god is a blessed and imperishable thing as is the common, general understanding of the god. You, Menoikeus, believe everything about which a god is able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself. Do not attribute anything foreign to its incorruptibility or incongruous with the blessedness of the god! Gods exist, and the knowledge of them is manifest to the mind's eye. The gods do not exist in the way that the 'hoi

polloi' believe them to, because they do not perceive what maintains the gods. One is not impious who does not take up the gods of the hoi polloi; but the one who attributes the beliefs of the hoi polloi to the gods. [124] For what they believe are not prolepses, but rather the judgements of the hoi polloi concerning the gods which are false, hasty assumptions. So, they believe the greatest evils are brought to the wicked from the gods as well as the greatest aid to the good, because the hoi polloi are believing that the gods accept those who resemble themselves who are similar through all excellences and goodness; all those not of their sort are strange and alien.

Furthermore, accustom yourself in believing that, for us, death is nothing since all pleasure and pain are in perception of the senses and the mind, and death is the absolute negation of perception. So, correct understanding is that death is nothing for us, and this is what makes the mortality of life enjoyable: not gaining an endless lifetime for oneself but taking away the yearning for not dying or immortality. [125] For there is nothing terrible in living for the one who truly comprehends that there is nothing terrible in not living. So, the one who says death is to be feared is foolish, not that there will be pain and distress when it is present but that there is pain in anticipation; because that which is present does not trouble, disquiet, or annoy, and anticipation itself pains and distresses one fruitlessly. Death, that which causes utter horror, which causes one to shudder, that "most utterly horrifying of pains" as it is understood by the hoi polloi, then is nothing to us. On the one hand, at the time when we are (that is while we are living), death is not present; on the other hand, whenever death is present, then we are not (that is, we don't exist). Death is neither a concern for those who are living nor for those whose lives are ended.

But the hoi polloi, on the one hand, flee from death as if it is the greatest evil, then, on the other hand, on the other hand, they desire for themselves an ending of the evil (pain) in living. [126] So then, the wise one neither begs nor craves for living nor fears not living: Neither to set oneself against living, nor to imagine that it is evil to not live. Just as the most food is not chosen but that which brings the greatest pleasure; choose as well not the longest time but that in which one enjoys the fruits of that which bring the greatest pleasure.

So, the one who exhorts, on the one hand, for the one who is young to live nobly; and, on the other hand, the one who is old to come to an end nobly is a good-hearted simpleton not only because life is to be welcomed but also because the practice of living well, nobly, and beautifully and the practice of dying well, nobly, and beautifully are the same. But far worse is the one who says, on the one hand, it is well not to be born; or, on the other hand,

"failing this, to pass through the gates of Hades as soon as possible."

[127] On the one hand, if what they say is persuasive, how does one not depart from life? For this is readily at hand, if indeed one was to resolve oneself steadfastly to this. If, on the other hand, this is in jest, one is foolish for making fun of things which do not admit of this.

Also, one must remember that "that which is to come" is neither ours nor by no means not ours, neither by our waiting a little longer for "that which will be" nor giving up in desiring altogether "that which will be not be."

Furthermore, on the one hand, there are the natural desires; on the other, the 'empty, fruitless, or vain ones.' And of the natural ones, on the one hand, are the necessary ones; on the other, the ones which are only natural; then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, those necessary for eudaimonia; then, those necessary for the freedom from disturbance for the body; then those necessary for life itself. [128] The steady contemplation of these things equips one to know how to decide all choice and rejection for the health of the body and for the tranquility of the mind, that is for our physical and our mental existence, since this is the goal of a blessed life. For the sake of this, we do everything in order to neither be in bodily or mental pain nor to be in fear or dread; and so, when once this has come into being around us, it sets free all of the calamity, distress, and suffering of the mind, seeing that the living being has no need to go in search of something that is lacking for the good of our mental and physical existence. For it is then that we need pleasure, if we were to be in pain from the pleasure not being present; but if we were to not be in pain, we no longer desire or beg for pleasure. And this is why we say pleasure is the foundation and fulfillment of the blessed life. [129] Because we perceived pleasure as a fundamental good and common to our nature, and so, as a result of this, we begin every choice and rejection against this, judging every good thing by the standard of how that pleasure affects us or how we react to considering experiencing that pleasure. And because pleasure is the fundamental and inborn good, this is why not every pleasure is seized and we pass by many pleasures when greater unpleasant things were to result for us as a result: and we think many pains better than pleasures whenever greater pleasure were to follow for a longer time by patiently abiding the pain. [130] So, all pleasure, through its nature, belongs to us as a good; however, not all are elected; and just as all pains are entirely evil by their nature, so not all are always to be shunned. It is proper when judging these things to consider what is advantageous and what is not advantageous for you; in other words, what the consequences will be. We consult the consequences of our actions; because, on the one hand, pleasure over time can lead to pain; and on the other hand, pain can lead to pleasure.

Additionally, we believe αὐτάρκεια is a great good. Not so that we are furnished with the use of a few things; but, if we were to have many things, we would be content with few things. Those in need who are genuinely convinced of this find extravagance more pleasant, and that every natural desire is easily procured, and an empty desire difficult to get. For simple flavors bring equal pleasure to extravagant ways of life when once the pain of body and mind experienced

through lack or deficiency is removed. [131] A simple meal of hearty, wholesome bread and spring water delivers the most extreme pleasure whenever food and drink have been brought to bear against hunger and thirst; and, when extravagant experiences do come up every once in a while, they are experienced more intensely by us, and we are better able to fearlessly face the vicissitudes of fortune.

Therefore, whenever we say repeatedly that "pleasure is the τέλος," we do not say the pleasure of those who are prodigal like those who are ignorant, those who don't agree with us, or those who believe wrongly; but we mean that which neither pains the body nor troubles the mind. [132] For it is not an endless string of drinking parties and festivals, and not taking advantage of slaves and women, nor does an extravagant table of fish and other things bring forth a sweet life but self-controlled reasoning and examining the cause of every choice and rejection and driving out the greatest number of opinions that take hold of the mind and bring confusion and trouble.

And so the foundation of all these and the greatest good is φρόνησις, practical wisdom. On this account, practical wisdom is prized more dearly than philosophy itself, and from practical wisdom springs forth all the remaining virtues, teaching us that a pleasurable life does not exist without the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice; nor do the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice without pleasure: because the virtues grow together with a pleasurable life and the pleasurable life is inseparable from these. [133] Seeing that, whom do you consider is better or more powerful than one who holds pious beliefs concerning the gods; one who has absolutely no fears concerning death; one who has rationally determined the τέλος of one's natural state; and the one who grasps that, on the one hand, good things (namely pleasures) are both easily attained and easily secured, and, on the other hand, evil things (or pains) are either short in time or brief in suffering; someone who laughs at Fate which is introduced onto the stage of life by many as the mistress of all things? For that person, even though some things happen by necessity, some by chance, and some by our own power, for although necessity is beyond our control, they see that chance is unstable and there is no other master beyond themselves, so that praise and its opposite are inseparably connected to themselves. [134] Because of this, it is better to follow the stories of the gods than to be enslaved by the deterministic decrees of the old natural philosophers, because necessity is not moved by prayer; and such a one accepts that Fortune is not a god, as the hoi polloi understand (for a god does nothing in a disorderly or haphazardly manner); And it is not the uncertain cause of everything, for one cannot think it can grant good or evil for a person's blessed life; however, it does furnish for oneself the starting point of great goods and great evils, [135] believing that it is better to be unfortunate rationally than fortunate irrationally because it is better to have been deciding the noble way in accomplishing one's actions and to have been foiled than having decided the bad way and to succeed by means of chance.

Meditate day and night then on this and similar things by yourself as well as together with those like yourself. And never, neither awake nor in sleep, throw yourself into confusion, and you will live as a god among humans; because no person who lives among eternal pleasures is like a mortal being.

Verse 121 (end)

The beginning of the *Letter to Menoikeus* comes at the very end of verse 121 in Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, Book X.

Verse 121: Ἐπίκουρος Μενουκεῖ χαίρειν.

"Epicurus to Menoikeus: Greetings!"

- Ἐπίκουρος is, of course, Epicurus himself, author of the letter.
- Μενουκεῖ
 - Next comes the name of the recipient - Μενουκεύς (Menoikeus) - in the dative case, Μενουκεῖ, signifying "to/for..." You most likely see the name of the recipient most often referred to as Menoeceus. This is simply the Latin form of his name. However, he was Greek! Menoeceus simply results from the penchant for scholars to have once felt it necessary to translate *everything* into Latin. We'll try to avoid that proclivity here and refer consistently to him using his transliterated Greek name: Menoikeus. I have seen references online that state Menoikeus was from Lampsacus (one of Epicurus's former residences before coming to Athens), but I can find no authoritative source for confirming this.
- χαίρειν
 - And finally, the salutation: χαίρειν which can be translated: Greetings, Hail, Joy(-fully), Rejoice (as a salutation). As will be seen in 122e, this word shares a root with χαρά "joy" (one of the "kinetic" pleasures) and χάρις "gratitude, grace." See more at 122e.

Then, no other pleasantries. Epicurus gets right down to work!

It's important to remember that the letter is, unfortunately, without context. We know nothing about Menoikeus himself. We may theorize he was younger than Epicurus although this is relative to Epicurus's age. We don't know what prompted Epicurus to write the letter to him other than a desire by Menoikeus to have a summary of the ethical teachings of Epicurus. All we have, thanks to Diogenes Laertius, is the text of the letter. In some ways, this is beneficial in that this allows us to imagine Epicurus writing his letter to all of us.

Verse 122

Bailey 122. Μήτε νέος τις ὢν μελλέτω φιλοσοφεῖν, μήτε γέρων ὑπάρχων κοπιάτω φιλοσοφῶν. οὔτε γὰρ ἄωρος οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν οὔτε πάρωρος πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν ὑγιαῖνον. ὁ δὲ λέγων ἢ μήπω τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπάρχειν ἢ παρεληλυθέναι τὴν ὥραν ὁμοίως ἐστὶ τῷ λέγοντι πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἢ μήπω παρεῖναι τὴν ὥραν ἢ μηκέτ' εἶναι. ὥστε φιλοσοφητέον καὶ νέω καὶ γέροντι, τῷ μὲν ὅπως γηράσκων νεάζῃ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς διὰ τὴν χάριν τῶν γεγονότων, τῷ δ' ὅπως νέος ἅμα καὶ παλαιὸς ἦ διὰ τὴν ἀφοβίαν τῶν μελλόντων. μελετᾶν οὖν χρὴ τὰ ποιοῦντα τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν, εἴ περ παρούσης μὲν αὐτῆς πάντα ἔχομεν, ἀπούσης δὲ πάντα πράττομεν εἰς τὸ ταύτην ἔχειν.

122a: **Μήτε** νέος τις ὢν μελλέτω φιλοσοφεῖν, **μήτε** γέρων ὑπάρχων κοπιάτω φιλοσοφῶν.

This sentence begins with **μήτε... μήτε...** meaning "Neither... nor..." so we are being set up for two things, both of which are to be negated. These two are:

- a. νέος τις ὢν μελλέτω φιλοσοφεῖν
- b. γέρων ὑπάρχων κοπιάτω φιλοσοφῶν.

Epicurus echoes each line, ending them both with forms of φιλοσοφέω (philosophēō), the word meaning literally "to love wisdom" or what we know as "philosophy." Most modern translations simply use "it" in the second phrase, losing the immediacy and importance of that word. The word also implies not only "loving" but "living" what you love, talking the talk and walking the walk, practicing what you preach, and so on. Epicurus's decision to use the same word should inform your translation decision. If it was good enough for Epicurus to repeat the word, maybe it would be a good idea to continue that in translation.

Let's examine our two negated phrases closer:

νέος τις ὢν μελλέτω φιλοσοφεῖν

- νέος (τις ὢν) "(One who is) young (neos)"
 - English: prefix neo- as in Neolithic, neologism, neonatal etc.
- μελλέτω: 3rd person singular imperative active present of μέλλω
 - to think of doing, intend to do, to mean to
 - to be about to do
 - (by fate), to be destined to do, to be fated to do
 - (by the will of other men, rare)
 - (to denote a foregone conclusion)
 - (to mark a strong possibility) to be likely to do
 - (to mark mere intention, to be always going to do without ever doing) to delay, put off, hesitate
 - "(he) must intend to..."

I'll use "he" here for the 3rd person singular since the letter is specifically addressed to Menoikeus and the word νέος is masculine; however, I would urge readers to consider Epicurus's practice of welcoming all people into the Garden. He could just as readily, I believe, have used a phrase to include both young men and women with a 3rd person plural verb. But that could have been awkward and clumsy grammatically if he tried to maintain a personal letter to Menoikeus. So, readers are encouraged to remember Epicurus's unprecedented inclusivity in the Garden, to look for universally applicable themes and advice in the Letter but also to remember this is also an intimate letter to one individual that has been preserved for posterity. It was obviously preserved and passed down for its value as an epitome or summary of Epicurus's ethical teaching for the wider Epicurean community, just as the letters of the later Christian apostles to specific people (Timothy) and communities (Corinth, Rome, Ephesus, etc.) were preserved as general teachings for everyone. However, being Epicurus's letter is addressed to one person, the letter shows Epicurus's concern for each individual looking to lead a more pleasureable life. The letter is addressed to one and all at the same time.

μέλλω shows up again in 122f and 125b: διὰ τὴν ἀφοβίαν τῶν **μελλόντων**· (3rd person plural present active imperative of μέλλω). We'll dissect this in detail later, but we should keep in mind this sense of intention or "about to do (something)" when we reach that section, although this word comes with a wide variety of shades of meaning.

Therefore:

μήτε νέος τις ὢν μελλέτω φιλοσοφεῖν

“**Neither** must one who is young delay (or be about to engage in) the study and love of wisdom...”

Now, our second phrase to be negated:

γέρων ὑπάρχων κοπιάτω φιλοσοφῶν.

- γέρων (gerōn) "one who is old"
 - English: gerontology
- ὑπάρχων κοπιάτω "begin to grow weary/tired of"

ὑπάρχων has a wide variety of meanings, but here connotes beginning, coming into being, arising, springing up.

Therefore:

μήτε γέρων ὑπάρχων κοπιάτω φιλοσοφῶν.

"Nor should one who is old grow tired of studying and loving wisdom."

122b: οὔτε γὰρ ἄωρος οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν οὔτε πάρωρος πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν ὑγιαῖνον.

This sentence begins with οὔτε... οὔτε... which, similar to μήτε...μήτε..., conveys negation: "and not... and neither..." Again, we're saying "not this and not that." So, Epicurus is mirroring μήτε ... μήτε... from the first sentence thus reinforcing them both. We'll notice this parallel/mirror style in his writing throughout the Letter.

γὰρ. A conjunction meaning variously "for, since, because, etc." According to Liddell, Scott, and Jones' *Ancient Greek Lexicon* (LSJ), γὰρ introduces the reason or cause of what precedes it. So this sentence will provide the reason for why one is never too young or too old to love and practice wisdom.

γὰρ is required to come after the first word in the sentence in Greek but needs to be translated into English as the first word. We'll be encountering *a lot* of these kinds of short words and pairs of words in our exploration. They are very common in Ancient Greek. Technically, these kinds of words are called particles, enclitics, proclitics, etc., but I'll try to keep the technicalities to a minimum unless it's going to impact significantly on the meaning. They add much of the complexity and nuance to the language. Small but mighty.

ἄωρος and πάρωρος "untimely, unseasonable" from α- a- "not" + ὥρα (h)ōra (per LSJ) "any period, fixed by natural laws and revolutions, whether of the year, month, or day" or "the fitting time or season for a thing" So, literally "not the fitting time" or "not the season." πάρωρος (parōros) may convey παρα + ὥρα (para + (h)ōra) "out of season, untimely."

οὐδείς (oudeis) "no one, nobody, none, nothing"

πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν ὑγιαῖνον

"for the health/soundness (ὑγιαῖνον (hygiainon)) of the the mind/soul/'animating life principle' (ψυχὴν (psykhē))"

- psychēn: English psychology, psyche
- hygiainon: English hygiene

If we're discussing the health of the *psychē*, what is the *psychē*? The *psychē* is often spoken of in relation to the physical body: e.g., "the health of the body (τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν) and the *serenity* of the *psychē* (τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀταραξίαν (psychēs *ataraxian*) from later in this letter). Epicurus also uses *psychē* to refer to that which senses so there's an aspect of the mind, albeit spread throughout one's body: καὶ μὴν ὅτι ἔχει ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς αἰσθήσεως τὴν πλείστην αἰτίαν δεῖ κατέχειν: "Further, we must keep in mind that *psychē* has the greatest share in causing *sensation*" (from the *Letter to Herodotus*). But remember that the soul/mind or *psychē* is composed of atoms and void just like the body but of a very subtle kind to be able to move swiftly so we can sense our sensations. So, just because translators often use the word "soul" for *psychē*, do not

bring along the semantic baggage that that word has in English. The Epicurean *psykhē* is definitely not an immortal thing that exists independent of the body that lives on after death or transmigrates to another life as expounded by almost every religion and argued vehemently against by Epicurus.

122c: ὁ δὲ λέγων ἢ μήπω τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπάρχειν ἢ παρεληλυθέναι τὴν ὥραν ὅμοιός ἐστι τῷ λέγοντι πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἢ μήπω παρεῖναι τὴν ὥραν ἢ μηκέτ' εἶναι.

We're going to break this down since the combination of ἢ... ἢ... means 'either... or...' or 'whether... or...' so there are two pairs of ἢ's in that first section. Again, an example of Epicurus's mirror writing style.

ὁ δὲ λέγων "(and) one who says..."

i. ἢ μήπω τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπάρχειν ὥραν "either the season (ὥραν) to love and practice wisdom is not yet arrived"

ii. ἢ παρεληλυθέναι τὴν ὥραν, "or the season (ὥραν) has passed by"

ὅμοιός ἐστιν τῷ λέγοντι πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν...

"is like someone who is saying [i and ii below] for eudaimonia..."

i. ἢ μὴ παρεῖναι τὴν ὥραν "either the proper time has not arrived"

ii. ἢ μηκέτι εἶναι. "or is no more." (i.e., has passed)

Note how Epicurus again - as he did in the previous section - uses ὥραν "the proper time or season for something" to drive the point home. There is no "proper" time or season to love and practice wisdom. The time is always *now*!

122d-f. ὥστε φιλοσοφητέον καὶ νέῳ καὶ γέροντι, τῷ μὲν ὅπως γηράσκων νεάζῃ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς διὰ τὴν χάριν τῶν γεγονότων, τῷ δ' ὅπως νέος ἅμα καὶ παλαιὸς ἢ διὰ τὴν ἀφοβίαν τῶν μελλόντων.

122d: ὥστε φιλοσοφητέον καὶ νέῳ καὶ γέροντι,...

- ὥστε has a number of uses but here we can say that it is being used at the beginning of the sentence to mark a particularly strong conclusion and can translate it "therefore, consequently" or even "so."
- φιλοσοφητέον καὶ νέῳ καὶ γέροντι
 - "both young (νέῳ) and old (γέροντι) must pursue wisdom"
- φιλοσοφητέος is related to φιλοσοφέω and means "one must pursue wisdom"

- **καὶ...καὶ...** gives the sense of "both x and y."

122e: τῷ μὲν ὅπως γηράσκων νεάζῃ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς διὰ τὴν χάριν τῶν γεγονότων,...

This is the first of two parallel phrases to round out this section. We see the **μὲν** "on the one hand..." setting up the pair of phrases, so we then look for the **δὲ** "... on the other hand..." and, sure enough, we find that in 122f. This "on the one hand... on the other hand..." is a translation trope for **μὲν...δὲ...**, but it's also a handy tool when breaking down a larger passage. It doesn't always make sense in the final translation, but it's not a bad starting place. Even though both **μὲν** and **δὲ** must come second in their respective phrases (for grammatical reasons too complicated to get into here), they should be considered to be (in English) the introductory word of the phrase.

[μὲν] [ὅπως] τῷ γηράσκων νεάζῃ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς

- ὅπως has a number of meanings including "so, in order that" or used in comparisons "like, as."

τῷ γηράσκων (τῷ *gēra*skōn < *geron*) "for one who has grown old" (a dative construction, so translate as "to, for"). Consider this as not someone who is just old but someone who has experienced life and has *become* old.

νεάζῃ (*neazē* < *neos*) "to grow or become young again" (in dative to go with τῷ γηράσκων)

τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς "for the good things"

This is a significant phrase! Remember the Tetrpharmakos's third line is:

καὶ τὰγαθὸν μὲν εὐκτητον "and, on the one hand, The Good is easy to obtain"

Note our old friend **μὲν** is setting us up for the **δὲ** in the last line of the Tetrpharmakos. So, τὰγαθὸν here is τ- from the definite article + ἀγαθὸν "good", so "The (greatest) good" is being conveyed, which according to Epicurus is pleasure, that to which everything else points. τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς here in the *Letter to Menoikeus* is simply the dative form. So, I strongly contend that we should translate τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς here as "for the pleasures."

...διὰ τὴν χάριν τῶν γεγονότων,...

διὰ is a preposition meaning "through" or "by means of."

- English diameter (διὰ (*dia*) + meter "measure through")

διὰ τὴν χάριν τῶν γεγονότων,..."by means of the gratitude (*χάρις*) of that which has happened, that which has taken place" or, to more poetically paraphrase, "by means of the grace of memories of past events."

Bailey's commentary gives *"by the grateful recollection of the past', ie. of the philosophic truths which he learnt in earlier life."* I think Bailey is far too timid and narrowly-focused in his "philosophic truths" comment. Consider Vatican Sayings¹¹ 17 and 19, both mentioning the "good things" that have happened in the past:

Vatican Saying 17

It is not the young man who is most blessed but the old man who has lived nobly, because, being at his very peak, the young man stumbles around as if he were of many minds, but the old man has settled into old age as if in a harbor, secure in his gratitude for **the good things** he was once unsure of.

οὐ νέος μακαριστὸς ἀλλὰ γέρων βεβιωκὼς καλῶς· ὁ γὰρ νέος ἀκμῇ πολὺς ὑπὸ τῆς τύχης ἑτεροφρονῶν πλάζεται· ὁ δὲ γέρων καθάπερ ἐν λιμένι τῷ γήρᾳ καθώρμικεν, τὰ πρότερον δυσελπιστούμενα **τῶν ἀγαθῶν** ἀσφαλεῖ κατακλείσας χάριτι.

Vatican Saying 19

The one who forgets **the good things** they had yesterday becomes an old man today.

τοῦ γεγονότος ἀμνήμων **ἀγαθοῦ** γέρων τήμερον γέγνηται.

The academic discipline of Positive Psychology has documented the benefits of practicing gratitude. Epicurus expressed this two thousand years ago in this letter and elsewhere in his writings. We should be grateful for the pleasures we have experienced in the past, and, by reliving them in our memory, gain present pleasure from them.

χάριν (accusative of χάρις) is used in Christian texts for "grace (of God)." It also carries this idea of being thankful for or having gratitude for a favor being done. It also shares a root with χαίρειν, the salutation we met at the beginning, and χαρά "joy," one of the "kinetic" pleasures listed with euphrosyne in the (in)famous passage about katastematic and kinetic pleasures.

That was a lot to work, so let's review this "on the one hand" portion that we just dissected:

122e: τῷ μὲν ὅπως γηράσκων νεάζῃ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς διὰ τὴν χάριν τῶν γεγονότων,...

A *very* literal translation would be:

"On the one hand, in order that 'one who has grown old' can be young through gratitude of the "good things" (pleasures) which have taken place in the past,..."

¹¹ *The Vatican Sayings* is a collection of fragmentary writings and quotes from Epicurus and other early Epicureans which were preserved in a 14th-century manuscript preserved in the Vatican Library.

So that person who has grown old can look back over their life and fondly remember those pleasures - those good things - they have experienced when they were younger, literally making themselves feel young again.

122f: [δε] τῷ ὅπως νέος ἅμα καὶ παλαιὸς ἦ διὰ τὴν ἀφοβίαν τῶν μελλόντων.

- Here's our δε "... on the other hand..." and our second ὅπως "in order that..."
- τῷ νέος "for one who is young"
- ἅμα καὶ παλαιὸς ἦ
 - "and at the same time be old"
 - ἦ is a subjunctive of "to be," and παλαιὸς carries the sense of being old in years, being venerable. The subjunctive is a mood of verbs that expresses something imagined or wished for or possible.
- διὰ τὴν ἀφοβίαν τῶν μελλόντων
 - "by means of/through the fearlessness of what is intended to be done, what is to come."
 - As mentioned in 122a above, no matter how we translate μελλόντων we should keep in mind that sense of intention of what is to be done, the sense of anticipation.

Just as one who has grown old can relive past pleasures to feel young again, the one who is young can get the benefits of growing old without living the years yet by being fearless in looking ahead and weighing the consequences of their actions in the future, i.e., seeing themselves as being older and experiencing the consequences of their actions.

122g: μελετᾷν οὖν χρή τὰ ποιοῦντα τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν, εἴ περ παρούσης μὲν αὐτῆς πάντα ἔχομεν, ἀπουσίας δὲ πάντα πράττομεν εἰς τὸ ταύτην ἔχειν.

- [οὖν] μελετᾷν χρή
 - "[then] one must study, meditate on."
 - χρή expresses necessity! It is essential - to study, reflect, and meditate on...
- μελετᾷν carries the sense of attending to something closely, studying it, or meditating on it. It also means "to practise an art" and is akin to the Latin word *meditari*. We see this word again in verse 123 and 135.
- τὰ ποιοῦντα τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν
 - "that which produces eudaimonia."
 - We're going to leave eudaimonia untranslated for now. We'll revisit that word soon since we've encountered it twice already in just the first verse. For now, you can think of it as the woefully-inadequate English rendering of "happiness."
- εἴπερ "if indeed, if really"
 - This is a strengthened or fortified version of εἴ "if"

Note in the last two parts of 122g we again discover a μεν...δε... pair:

εἴπερ παρούσης μὲν αὐτῆς πάντα ἔχομεν,
ἀπούσης δέ πάντα πράττομεν εἰς τὸ ταύτην ἔχειν.

- [μὲν] εἴπερ παρούσης αὐτῆς πάντα ἔχομεν,...
 - "on the one hand, if this is present we have everything..."
- παρούσης "being present"

[δέ] [εἴπερ] ἀπούσης πάντα πράττομεν εἰς τὸ ταύτην ἔχειν.

- ἀπούσης "not being present, gone away, departed"
- "[on the other hand, if] this is not present or gone away, we do everything (πάντα πράττομεν)..."
- πάντα (panta) includes the familiar English prefix pan- "all, every, etc." in Pantheon (all gods), panacea "all cure," etc.
- πράττομεν "we do, practice, make, achieve"
- ...εἰς τὸ ταύτην ἔχειν. "... with regards to having that (i.e., eudaimonia)."

Note πράττομεν is the present active tense: "We do, make...etc." not "we would, should, might, may do..." There's no equivocation, no hedging: if we don't have ["that which produces eudaimonia"], we do everything to have it.

A quick digression on eudaimonia is appropriate here. εὐδαιμονία is defined by LSJ as "prosperity, good fortune, opulence; true, full happiness."

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3ADeu%3Adaimoni%2Fa>

The word is derived from εὖ- (eu-) "well, good" + δαιμονία (daimonia) "spirit, divine power." This is where English gets the word "demon" but it could be either benevolent (eudaimon) or malevolent (kakodaimon). If you have a good, benevolent in-dwelling spirit, you will lead a prosperous, healthy, flourishing, fortunate life. Socrates claimed to be listening to his daimon for guidance which was used against him at his trial as evidence of impiety. But the term generally in common parlance means what LSJ refers to. However, it encompasses a range of qualities but is often pared down in English to simply "happiness" which is woefully inadequate. It's much more than that, encompassing that and q more. Translators try to convey this with paraphrases like "complete happiness," but our comparative translations just use "happiness." Sometimes it's left untranslated and only transliterated eudaimonia, but this is somewhat of a cheat, too. A cheat I may be guilty of shortly! If you look up that word in Merriam-Webster, it gives "well-being, happiness." So you see we can go in circles. Personally, I think "well-being" is better than "happiness" since it is almost a literal translation with a twist: eu- "well" + daimon "being" (the latter having a little double entendre). So, when you see any of those -- happiness, well-being, flourishing, eudaimonia -- remember that it's that word plus a little more. That's why I advocate

using eudaimonia itself. There's a rabbit hole of papers, essays, and websites that convey the deep meaning of εὐδαιμονία if you feel intrepid. Consider this a taste of what awaits you.

Which finally brings us to the end of verse 122! Time to review and bring everything back together.

Now, a literal translation, putting into practice what we learned:
Epicurus to Menoikeus: Joyful greetings!

Neither must one who is young delay in loving and pursuing wisdom; nor should one who is old grow weary of loving and pursuing wisdom; because it is neither out of season nor untimely for the health of the psychē. And one who says either the season to love and practice wisdom is not yet arrived or the season has passed by is like someone who is saying either the proper time has not arrived or is no more for eudaimonia. Therefore, both the young and old must love and pursue wisdom. On the one hand, the old can be young by means of gratitude for the pleasures which have happened; on the other hand, the young can be as if they are old in years by means of the fearlessness of facing what is intended to be done or what is to come. You must study and meditate upon that which produces eudaimonia. For if indeed that is present, we have everything; if that is not present, we do anything to have it.

Verse 123

The beginning of verse 123 ends the thoughts begun in verse 122.

Bailey 123. Ἄ δέ σοι συνεχῶς παρήγγελλον, ταῦτα καὶ πρᾶττε καὶ μελέτα, στοιχεῖα τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν ταῦτ' εἶναι διαλαμβάνων. πρῶτον μὲν τὸν θεὸν ζῶν ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον νομίζων, ὥς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη, μηθὲν μῆτε τῆς ἀφθαρσίας ἀλλότριον μῆτε τῆς μακαριότητος ἀνοίκειον αὐτῷ πρόσαπτε· πᾶν δὲ τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετα ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτὸν δόξαζε. θεοὶ μὲν γάρ εἰσιν· ἐναργῆς γὰρ αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ γνῶσις. οἴους δ' αὐτοὺς <οἱ> πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν, οὐκ εἰσὶν· οὐ γὰρ φυλάττουσιν αὐτοὺς οἴους νοοῦσιν. ἀσεβῆς δὲ οὐχ ὁ τοὺς τῶν πολλῶν θεοὺς ἀναιρῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ τὰς τῶν πολλῶν δόξας θεοῖς προσάπτων.

123a. Ἄ **δέ** σοι συνεχῶς παρήγγελλον, ταῦτα καὶ πρᾶττε καὶ μελέτα, στοιχεῖα τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν ταῦτ' εἶναι διαλαμβάνων.

- ἃ is a relative pronoun meaning "who, which, that, those (plural), etc."
- δέ in this case is simply the connection between two phrases like "and" showing that the end of 122 and 123a are connected. Remember, there are no verse divisions in the original text! The verses are merely a scholarly convention.
- συνεχῶς "continuously, continually, unceasingly"
- σοὶ παρήγγελλον "to you exhorting, encouraging, recommending". Related to ἄγγελος (angelos) "messenger, one that announces" from which English gets "angel."

Therefore: "I [i.e., Epicurus] was continually exhorting you [i.e., Menoikeus]..."

ταῦτα καὶ πρᾶττε καὶ μελέτα,...

We encounter here again two words we saw in 122g: πρᾶττε and μελέτα. And the καὶ...καὶ... means "both x and y."

So... "both to practice and to study (to meditate on) these things..."

- στοιχεῖα τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν "elements of a beautiful/noble life" or "elements of living well/beautifully"
 - στοιχεῖον, the singular form of the plural στοιχεῖα used in this verse, means "one of a series; component, element" and can also refer to the basic elements of a discipline like numbers in arithmetic, points and lines in geometry, parts of speech in grammar, etc.
 - καλῶς (adverb form of καλός) is a slippery word used to convey a wide range of meanings in Ancient Greek. The *English–Greek Dictionary: A Vocabulary of the Attic Language* (1910) by S.C. Woodhouse lists the following English synonyms for καλός:

- admirable
- artistic
- beautiful, handsome, elegant, lovely, ornamental, picturesque
- estimable
- excellent
- favourable, propitious
- auspicious, fortunate, lucky, happy, promising, well-favoured
- good
- high-principled, honourable, noble,, principled, reputable, righteous, virtuous
- skilful
- ...to name only a selection. This is a prime example of the difficulty inherent in translating from one language to another.

Cicero (speaking as "Torquatus") uses the exact phrase, καλῶς ζῆν, translated into Latin in *De Finibus*, Book 1: beatae vitae, where it is often translated "happy life."

στοιχεῖα τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν ταῦτ' εἶναι διαλαμβάνων. Literally: "The basic elements of living 'beautifully/καλῶς' these I state distinctly to be..."

As stated above, the beginning of verse 123 actually finishes the thoughts from 122. To provide a full, very literal translation of 123a:

ἂ δέ σοι συνεχῶς παρήγγελλον, ταῦτα καὶ πράττε καὶ μελέτα, στοιχεῖα τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν ταῦτ' εἶναι διαλαμβάνων.

"And to you (i.e., Menoikeus), I (i.e., Epicurus) was continuously exhorting to practice, to study, and to meditate on those things which I state distinctly to be the basic elements of a noble, beautiful, and virtuous life."

Epicurus will then go on in this letter to outline those στοιχεῖα τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν, those "basic elements of a noble, beautiful, and virtuous life."

It is a disservice to both μελέτα and καλῶς to translate them as one word. Μελέτα carries the sense of "study" but also of considering a topic deeply, really sitting with something and digging into it. And we've looked at the multitude of meanings associated with καλῶς. To pick only one English word obscures the depth of these two ancient Greek terms.

123b begins the review of those elements of living nobly, beautifully, and virtuously.

123b. **πρῶτον μὲν** τὸν θεὸν ζῶον ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον νομίζων, ὥς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη,

- μὲν can stand on its own, as here, in which case it can mean "so, whereas, and so" but it can also be left untranslated.
- The passage begins, appropriately enough, with πρῶτον (prōton) which literally means "first" but can also carry the idea of "primarily, foremost, most prominently, etc." So, Epicurus isn't just saying, "Okay, number one..." numerically but rather "This is important so I'm telling you this *first*!"
- The verb, νομίζων, comes last and means "believe, hold, consider." What are we to believe? We are to hold that: τὸν θεὸν ζῶον ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον. So, what does that mean? Let's break it down.
- θεὸν is transliterated *theon* and is where English gets theology and atheist. τὸν θεὸν is singular, but, singular or plural, this can refer to a god, the gods, or the divine in general. However, David Sedley in his paper "Epicurus' Theological Innatism" <https://www.academia.edu/resource/work/11365772> places significance on the singular construction. Sedley proposed each person creates their own "god" which is why he stressed the importance of the singular form. Sedley's paper is recommended reading. So, where the word is singular, I will try to translate it as such as to not obscure the semantics.

τὸν θεὸν ζῶον "a god (is a) ζῶον. But what is a ζῶον?

ζῶον (zōon) is where English zoology comes from.

LSJ gives two primary definitions:

- living being, animal
- in art, figure, image, not necessarily of animals (or a *sign* of the Zodiac)

So, unfortunately, at this point in the Letter we can't necessarily resolve the question of what the nature of the gods (or of a god) is according to Epicurus. Some scholars think Epicurus believed the gods were material beings ("living being, animal") somehow living between the various world-systems (cosmos) in the universe. Some think Epicurus believed the gods were mental representations or personifications of the concepts ("figure, image, sign") of blessedness.

The Letter goes on to describe what kind of ζῶον a god is: ἄφθαρτον and μακάριον

These are the *exact* words used in the first of the Principal Doctrines (Κυριαὶ Δοξαί): Τὸ μακάριον καὶ ἄφθαρτον "One who is blessed and *imperishable*." (Note, these are again singular.) The words held the first spot in the Principal Doctrines, and Epicurus chooses this as the first element of noble living of which to remind Menoikeus. Πρῶτον, indeed! Epicurus obviously

placed a great deal of importance on this topic so it behooves us to study it in-depth, to engage in some μελέτη.

μακάριον

This word is often translated as "blessed, fortunate, wealthy, 'well-off.'" There appears to be no certain etymology of the root [makar] or the longer form [makarios/on]. It appears to possibly have something to do with being wealthy, either literally or figuratively. *Taking Ancient Mythology Economically* by Morris Silver¹² has a very interesting section on the origins of the word. This is yet *another* example of the inadequacy of using one word to translate from one language to another.

ἄφθαρτον

LSJ gives the definition of "incorruptible, eternal, immortal, uncorrupted, undecaying" and gives references to Epicurus, Philodemus, and Diogenes of Oenoanda. At its root, the word is α- "not" + φθαρτον "destructible, perishable." LSJ states φθαρτον is the opposite of αἰδιος "everlasting, eternal" (related to αἰεί "ever, always") which poses an interesting question: Why did Epicurus choose to use ἄφθαρτον instead of αἰδιος or ἀθάνατος? Φθαρτον is related to θνητός "liable to death, mortal, opposite: ἀθάνατος [athanatos]" (LSJ) Φθαρτον is also connected to the verb φθείρω "destroy, pass away, cease to be, perish." It seems that Epicurus didn't want to evoke that the gods (a god?) were simply immortal or eternal but that he wanted to impress upon us the sense that they would not pass away or cease to be. This is in contrast to everything else composed of atoms and void. *Everything* else is subject to be φθαρτον; only the gods are ἄφθαρτον! How can this be? Could it be that they are ἄφθαρτον precisely because they are mental concepts? That's one of the reasons I find Sedley's so-called "idealist" nature of the Epicurean gods intriguing.

I have also seen arguments that the stress should not be on the "eternal," as in everlasting in time, but rather the "incorruptible," as in the state of being. A "god" is "incorruptible" or "not able to be corrupted or to decay." They are unaffected by the vicissitudes of fortune, unaffected by anger or gratitude. To me, this is an intriguing perspective and gives a possible reason why Epicurus made the decision to use ἄφθαρτον and not an alternative that evokes the "eternal in time" connotation like ἀθάνατος. From my perspective, this argument is a strong one and deserves some study and thought. For now, let's move on to see if there are more clues.

123b.ii: ὥς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη,

- ὥς introduces similes or qualifies statements and so a good translation is something like "like, as, such as, so far as."
- ἡ κοινὴ (koinē) τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις "the common or general understanding of the god" Note that this is also why we speak of the later evolution of the Greek language as "koine"

¹² Silver, Morris. [*Taking Ancient Mythology Economically*. Leiden: E.J. Brill. 1992. p. 78](#)

Greek" "the common Greek, the Greek spoken by a wide population across the Greek-speaking world." Is Epicurus talking here about the general understanding among the general population? Or is he talking about the common understanding of a god among Epicureans? He specifically talks about the wrong understanding of the "hoi polloi" below, so I am inclined to think he's referring to the masses here and not the community of Epicureans. Be aware that the line is ambiguous.

- ὑπεγράφη "has been outlined, traced"
 - Epicurus is using the image of outlining or tracing an image to be filled in by another. Consider this like the image of letters indicated by a teacher by an outline or tracing for the student to then follow. So the idea that the gods are imperishable and blessed is, basically, how the gods are commonly understood to be -- that is the general indication of the nature of the gods. Whether that is the general indication among Epicureans or the general public remains a question.

Bailey did provide an interesting note on ὑπεγράφη. His point was that the images received by the mind or in one's mind (the prolepsis we'll see below) gave people generally the "outline" of blessedness and incorruptibility. Then false opinions grew up outside of what was outlined in the mind. Food for thought.

123c. μηθὲν μήτε τῆς ἀφθαρσίας ἀλλότριον μήτε τῆς μακαριότητος ἀνοίκειον αὐτῷ πρόσαπτε·

After μηθὲν "not even one, nobody", we find another μήτε... μήτε... pair:

1. μήτε τῆς ἀφθαρσίας ἀλλότριον "neither the incorruption nor immortality (is) foreign or strange"
2. μήτε τῆς μακαριότητος ἀνοίκειον "nor (is) the 'blessedness' foreign to or incongruous with"

ἀνοίκειον literally means "not of the family" or "not of the household" where οἶκειον (οἶκος) is the house or domestic sphere. Related to 123b.ii and the "common" understanding, ἀνοίκειον *could* refer to the "house/family" of Epicurus's students and community.

This line then finishes with αὐτῷ πρόσαπτε: literally, "(dative) to itself, you attribute to! You attach to, You fasten upon." (Imperative)

123c. μηθὲν μήτε τῆς ἀφθαρσίας ἀλλότριον μήτε τῆς μακαριότητος ἀνοίκειον αὐτῷ πρόσαπτε: "Do not attribute anything foreign to the incorruptibility or incongruous with the blessedness of itself (the god)!" This is where Bailey's interpretation is interesting.

123d. πᾶν δὲ τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετα ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτὸν δόξαζε.

Remember δὲ "and, so" comes second in Greek but first in English.

The imperative verb comes last again, connected with the first word of the phrase:

δόξαζε πᾶν "You think, believe, imagine everything (πᾶν (pan))!"

Believe *what* about everything?

τὸ φυλάττειν αὐτοῦ δυνάμενον τὴν μετ' ἀφθαρσίας μακαριότητα περὶ αὐτοῦ

- φυλάττειν "to guard, maintain, preserve, etc."
- δυνάμενον "being able, capable, strong enough to do, can"

Bringing all 123a-d back together:

"(You, Menoikeus,) Believe everything about which a god is able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself."

123e. θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσιν·

If we take out the μὲν (and look for the inevitable δε in the next phrase) and move γὰρ "because, for" out of the way for now, we can pare this down to its essential:

θεοὶ εἰσιν. "Gods exist." "There are gods."

The implications of those two words have had entire essays (if not whole books) written about them. We looked at this a little in 123b with ζῶον. But Epicurus is not equivocating here: **Gods exist.** What he *means* by this we simply have to discover from his extant works and fragments. Again, if we take Sedley's position, each person has their own personal concept of a god. Many people, many individual gods.

123f. ἐναργὴς γὰρ αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ γνῶσις.

- Here's our δέ "on the other hand."
- ἐναργὴς [δέ] ἐστὶν αὐτῶν ἡ γνῶσις

"And the knowledge (ἡ γνῶσις (gnōsis)) of them (θεοί "gods", note the plural here) is ἐναργὴς." But what does ἐναργὴς mean?

It has two primary definitions:

- visible, palpable, in bodily shape, properly of gods appearing in their own forms (in Homer); so of a dream or vision; ex., ἐναργὴς ταῦρος "in visible form a bull, a very bull"
- manifest to the mind's eye, distinct

Epicurus can't mean the first meaning since he's adamant that the gods don't interact with humans. But the second definition coincides with his contention (and the idea of the prolepsis of the gods) that the gods are apprehended by the mind only. That also sets up a nice contrast with the first definition's use by Homer in describing the Olympian gods appearing "in visible form." Homer's gods were *εναργής* in one sense of the word; Epicurus's in the other sense.

Unfortunately, this does nothing to resolve our problem with puzzling out how the gods are ζῶον. Are they physically-existent material beings? Are they existing only as mental perceptions manifest merely to the mind's eye? The ambiguous nature of *εναργής* doesn't necessarily help us fully. It does, however, set up some of Epicurus's clever wordplay contrasting his view with Homer's.

123g. οἷους δ' αὐτοὺς <οἱ> πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν, οὐκ εἰσίν·

- οἷους
 - LSJ has this to say about οἷους: "Especially in Attic, often stands for ὅτι τοῖος, τοία, τοῖον, so that the relative introduces the reason for the preceding statement... if it is to be intimated that the reason is self-evident, and the assertion is beyond doubt, then δὴ is added..." (*Note: Which it is here! δ' is ellided but is actually δή.*)
- <οἱ> πολλοὶ is exactly what it means transliterated into English: "hoi polloi" the common people, the masses. It literally translates as "the many."

Paraphrase: "The gods 'do not exist' (οὐκ εἰσίν) in the way that the 'hoi polloi' believe them to (i.e., the way that the "hoi polloi" believe the gods to exist)."

So, gods exist (per Epicurus's earlier statement), but not in the way understood by the masses (the "hoi polloi").

123h. οὐ γὰρ φυλάττουσιν αὐτοὺς οἷους νοοῦσιν.

Note that Epicurus is reusing φυλάττουσιν like 123d's φυλάττειν: φυλαττουσιν "they maintain, protect, guard." And remember γὰρ means "for, because" and gets pushed to the front in English.

The main verb is at the end, again negated by οὐ from the beginning. οὐ νοοῦσιν means "not perceive, not observe, not see."

So:

"Because they (i.e., the hoi polloi) do not perceive what maintains them."

That is, the hoi polloi don't understand what maintains the gods imperishability and blessedness; the gods don't exist in the way the hoi polloi think they do! I believe Sedley would say that the gods exist imperishably and blessed because we continually construct the concept of them in our minds. Nothing definitive yet.

123i. ἀσεβῆς δὲ οὐχ ὁ τοὺς τῶν πολλῶν θεοὺς ἀναιρῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ τὰς τῶν πολλῶν δόξας θεοῖς προσάπτων.

- Again we see Epicurus's echoing writing style with using the term τῶν πολλῶν (genitive of hoi polloi) here as well as echoing the προσάπτων from the πρόσαπτε in 123c.
- ἀσεβῆς "ungodly, godless, unholy, profane, sacrilegious" from a- "not" + σέβομαι "to feel awe" Opposite of εὐσεβῆς (eusebēs) "Piety, reverence for the gods." Note: Peri Eusebeias is the title of Philodemus's work *On Piety*.
Note that the eu- prefix comes into English meaning "good, well" as in euthanasia (good death), eulogy (good words), etc.
- ἀναιρῶν "to take up"
- τοὺς τῶν πολλῶν θεοὺς
 - accusative: "the gods of the hoi polloi" (τῶν πολλῶν is again the plural genitive of hoi polloi "of the hoi polloi"). Note the plural gods here, not singular!
 - Greek grammar allows for these imbedded phrases:
 - τῶν πολλῶν "of the hoi polloi"; τοὺς θεοὺς "the gods"
- ἀλλ' (< ἀλλά) "but" We're getting a contrast with the first part of this line.
- ὁ τὰς τῶν πολλῶν δόξας "the beliefs of the hoi polloi" (same grammatical structure as above)
- θεοῖς (dative) "to/for the gods"
- προσάπτων "to attribute to, to attach to, to fasten upon."

"but the one who attributes the beliefs of the hoi polloi to the gods."

So...

"One is not ungodly who does not take up the gods of the hoi polloi; but the one who attributes the beliefs of the hoi polloi to the gods."

Which brings us to the end of verse 123!

Let's bring verse 123 all back together with a literal translation:

And, Menoikeus, I was continuously exhorting you to practice, to study, and to meditate on those things which I state distinctly to be the essential elements of a noble, beautiful, and virtuous life. First, believe that the god is a blessed and imperishable thing as is the common, general

understanding of the god. You, Menoikeus, believe everything about which a god is able to preserve its own imperishability and blessedness for itself. Do not attribute anything foreign to its incorruptibility or incongruous with the blessedness of the god! Gods exist, and the knowledge of them is manifest to the mind's eye. The gods do not exist in the way that the 'hoi polloi' believe them to, because they do not perceive what maintains the gods. One is not impious who does not take up the gods of the hoi polloi; but the one who attributes the beliefs of the hoi polloi to the gods.

Verse 124

Verse 124 completes the thoughts about the gods started in verse 123.

Bailey 124. οὐ γὰρ προλήψεις εἰσὶν ἀλλ' ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς αἱ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις, ἔνθεν αἱ μέγιστα βλάβαι τε τοῖς κακοῖς ἐκ θεῶν ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλειαι <τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς>. ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκειούμενοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς τοὺς ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται, πᾶν τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον ὡς ἀλλότριον νομίζοντες.

Συνέθιξε δὲ ἐν τῷ νομίζειν μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι τὸν θάνατον· ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν ἐν αἰσθήσει· στέρησις δὲ ἐστὶν αἰσθήσεως ὁ θάνατος. ὅθεν γνῶσις ὀρθὴ τοῦ μηθὲν εἶναι πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὸν θάνατον ἀπολαυστὸν ποιεῖ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς θνητόν, οὐκ ἄπειρον προστιθεῖσα χρόνον, ἀλλὰ τὸν τῆς ἀθανασίας ἀφελομένη πόθον.

124a. οὐ γὰρ προλήψεις εἰσὶν ἀλλ' ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς αἱ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις,

Let's break this down...

124a.i. οὐ γὰρ προλήψεις εἰσὶν,...

We've encountered γάρ before: "For, because."

"For 'these are not' (οὐ εἰσὶν) prolēpseis,"

Both εἰσὶν "are" and προλήψεις "prolēpseis" are plural and refer back to the opinions/beliefs of the hoi polloi in the previous verse.

But what are prolepses (to Anglicize the Greek word) or, in the singular, a prolepsis? This is a question that has been asked by scholars for decades if not centuries. It is often translated as "anticipations" but this is an inadequate substitute. Just like εὐδαιμονία, this is a rabbit hole down which you can explore indefinitely. LSJ gives the standard definition of "preconception, mental picture or scheme into which experience is fitted" which isn't a bad start.¹³

This is a technical term in both Epicurean and Stoic philosophy. For Epicurus, the prolepseis were part of his Canon or standard by which reality was measured, how you could be assured something was true or truly existed. His assertion that humans have a prolepsis of the gods or a god or divinity was a big part in his being able to say "gods exist." We all have a preconception or anticipation or mental template of some kind of eternal, blessed being in our minds. That exists. Epicurus tries to make sense of why that is a universal human trait and to give meaning to

¹³

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Dpro%2Fhyis>

that apart from the ideas of the hoi polloi. Again, entire books and papers have been written on the implications of prolepsis, and the reader is encouraged to explore as far as their interest and pleasure can take them.

124a.ii. ἀλλ' ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς αἱ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις

"but **the decisions, rulings, verdicts, judgements, resolutions** of the hoi polloi concerning the gods [are] *false conceptions, suppositions, assumptions*"

It's interesting to consider the relation of προλήψεις (prolēpseis) to ὑπολήψεις (hypolepseis). We looked at the official definition of prolepsis above. Hypolepsis is defined by LSJ as "assumption, notion; hasty judgement, prejudice, suspicion; etc." So, the prolepsis are in place before one starts formulating concepts. Hypo υπό has many definitions, but applicable ones here are "under, beneath; in small degree or gradual."¹⁴

The hypolepsis is formulated by only taking hold (the literal meaning of λήψις) of something in a small degree, by, let's say, "under-grasping" the idea. I take that to mean you've given it little cognitive, rational thought. It's a hasty judgement; whereas the prolepsis give rise to concepts. They're a building block pre-existent prior to taking hold of something. Okay, that's in the weeds, but should at least give you a glimpse of the complexity of what we're working with here.¹⁵

124b. ἔνθεν αἱ μέγιστα βλάβαι τε τοῖς κακοῖς ἐκ θεῶν ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλεια <τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς>.

- ἔνθεν "thence, from there"
- αἱ μέγιστα βλάβαι "the greatest hurts, harms, damages, mischiefs" (μέγιστα superlative degree of μέγας (megas) "biggest, largest"
 - English megalith "big stone", megachurch "big church"
- τε "also" (denotes a weaker connection than καὶ "and")
- τοῖς κακοῖς "(the) evils" (dative plural; of circumstances: injurious, wretched, unhappy; As a measure of character: low, mean, vile, evil) Note: as this is dative, it is most likely referring to people as in "for/to the vile, evil, wicked ones")
 - κακοῖς > κακός (kakos) > English cacophony "bad sounds"
- ἐκ θεῶν "from the gods"
- ἐπάγονται "(they) draw into themselves, procure for themselves, bring to themselves" (3d person plural verb)
- καὶ "and"

¹⁴

http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aalphabetic+letter%3D*%3Aentry+group%3D40%3Aentry%3Du%28po%2F

¹⁵

[http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Du\(po%2Flhyis](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Du(po%2Flhyis)

- ὠφέλεια (plural nominative)
 - help, aid, succour (especially in war)
 - profit, advantage, benefit
 - source of gain or profit, service
 - (and especially) gain made in war, spoil, booty
- τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς
 - This dative contrasts with τοῖς κακοῖς above and means "to/for the good ones." Basically, see it as the opposite of all those qualities listed under τοῖς κακοῖς.

So, to pull this back together: ἔνθεν αἱ μέγιστα βλάβαι τε τοῖς κακοῖς ἐκ θεῶν ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλεια τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς.

"Thence, the greatest evils are brought to the wicked from the gods as well as the greatest aid to the good." But remember, this is a false belief of the hoi polloi!

124c. ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκειούμενοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς τοὺς ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται,

- Again, γάρ "for, because"...
- ταῖς ἰδίαις (dative) "to/for the peculiar, distinct, personal ... "
- οἰκειούμενοι "to be familiarized to; become familiar with" (Note: again connected with the οικεῖος "house, family, household, private sphere.")
- διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς "through/by means of all ἀρεταῖς"
- ἀρεταῖς is the plural of ἀρετή (aretē) which is usually translated "virtue," especially in works of other schools of philosophy. However, its semantic spectrum is a little wider than this:
 - goodness, excellence
 - manliness, prowess, rank, valour
 - virtue
 - character, reputation, glory, fame, dignity, distinction
 - miracle, wonder

More on the difficulty of translating this passage below, but suffice it to say that we should regroup this into smaller passages. So far we have:

ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκειούμενοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς...

"Because those who are familiar with each other through all excellences and goodness"

ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται,

- τοὺς ὁμοίους (accusative) "those who are like, resembling"
- ἀποδέχονται "admit, accept, demonstrate" (3d person plural)

"Because those who are familiar with each other through all excellences and goodness (the gods) accept those who resemble themselves.."

124d. πᾶν τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον ὥς ἄλλότριον νομίζοντες.

- πᾶν "all, everything"
- τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον "one not of this sort"
- ὥς "like, as"
- ἄλλότριον "foreign, strange, alien" (accusative)
- νομίζοντες "believing" (masculine nominative/vocative plural of νομίζων)

124b-d isn't the easiest section to parse, evidently for both myself and scholars. According to Peter Saint-Andre: "This is a puzzling sentence. Some translators understand it as applying to 'the gods' from the previous sentence, with the sense that the gods would not interfere in human affairs because they don't care about ('consider as alien') mortal creatures who are so different from themselves. Other translators understand it as applying to 'most people' from the previous sentence, with the sense that most people assume that immortal beings so different from themselves must want to interfere in human affairs. I lean toward the former interpretation."

I am inclined to agree with Saint-Andre's general position here, and Bailey takes a similar stance. I have used a variation on this understanding to get the literal translation below.

Since 124a-d finish the topic started in 123, let's bring together that section before proceeding:

Greek:

124a-d: οὐ γὰρ προλήψεις εἰσὶν, ἀλλ' ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς αἱ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις: ἔνθεν αἱ μέγιστα βλάβαι τε τοῖς κακοῖς ἐκ θεῶν ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλειαι τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς. ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκείουμένοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς τοὺς ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται, πᾶν τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον ὥς ἄλλότριον νομίζοντες.

Literal translation:

"For they are not prolepses, but the judgements of the hoi polloi concerning the gods [which are] false, hasty assumptions; thence [believing] the greatest evils are brought to the wicked from the gods as well as the greatest aid to the good. Because they (the hoi polloi) are believing that those who are familiar with each other through all excellences and goodness (the gods) accept those who resemble themselves; all those not of their sort (are) strange and alien."

I take this to mean the gods (as conceived of by the hoi polloi!) are full of all excellences and virtue and grant favors and aid to good humans because they are like themselves; those who are evil, the gods reject as foreign and strange.

124e begins a new topic. It needs to be noted that some translations begin this section with "Second" since Epicurus used *πρώτον* "first" in 123b. In hindsight, I think a better way of interpreting that *πρώτον* is not "first" as in ordinal but "first" as in foremost. I do not endorse adding second, third, etc. because Epicurus didn't include those words.

124e. Συνέθιζε δὲ ἐν τῷ νομίζειν μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι τὸν θάνατον·

- δε "and" just serves as "furthermore, to continue, etc."
- Συνέθιζε "Accustom (yourself)! Become habituated to!"
- ἐν τῷ νομίζειν literally, "in the believing" and along with συνέθιζε means "Accustom yourself in the believing..." We would say "Become accustomed to believing..."
- μηδὲν "nothing"
- πρὸς ἡμᾶς "for us" "with regards to us"
- θάνατον (thanaton) "death" (accusative)

Συνέθιζε δὲ ἐν τῷ νομίζειν μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι τὸν θάνατον: "Furthermore, accustom yourself in believing that, for us, death is nothing."

124f. ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν ἐν αἰσθήσει·

- ἐπεὶ "since" (the cause of something)
- πᾶν ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν "all good things and evil things" (i.e., all pleasure and pain). Remember the ἀγαθὸν "good things" from the Tetrapharmakos and lines 122e and 124b. There is no doubt in my mind that "the good" in these passages is referring to pleasure. If this is the case then, the fact that Epicurus is specifically stating in the next phrase...
- ἐν αἰσθήσει "in perception from the senses, feeling, hearing, seeing, etc., and by the intellect"

ἐν αἰσθήσει is important since this seems to imply that all pleasure and pain is experienced through the senses (including the intellect), this gives me the impression that the Canon operates sequentially: we sense then react with pleasure or pain. Or is it the other way around? Well, I'm working on that. I'm coming to believe that the work of Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett on constructed emotions can shed some light on this topic. There is a sequence, but it may not be the one that the *hoi polloi* think! Where do the prolepses come in? Where the intellect? Where the "phantastikē epibolē tēs dianoias"? Barrett's work has some interesting implications for these, too, and the reader is encouraged to investigate her work. <https://lisafeldmanbarrett.com/>

124g. στέρησις δέ ἐστιν αἰσθήσεως ὁ θάνατος.

- Our old friend δε is used again as the conjunction, and this sentence is constructed "backwards" in relation to English. So, let's start at the end:
- ὁ θάνατος (thanatos) "death" ὁ is the definite article, often used in Greek in places we wouldn't normally use it in English. We would not translate this as "the death" for example, just "death" in general.

- αἰσθήσεως This is the genitive singular of the word above meaning "perception from the senses, feeling, hearing, seeing, etc., and by the intellect" so...
 - στέρησις αἰσθήσεως "deprivation/negation of perception from the senses, feeling, hearing, seeing, etc., and by the intellect"

So, 124e-g:

"So, accustom yourself in believing that, for us, death is nothing; since all good and bad things (pleasure and pain) are in perception of the senses and the mind; and death is the absolute negation of perception."

Lo and behold, this is the second Principal Doctrine¹⁶ as well as the second Vatican Saying: *Death is nothing to us; for what has been dissolved into its elements lacks sensation, and what lacks sensation is nothing to us.* ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς· τὸ γὰρ διαλυθὲν ἀναισθητεῖ, τὸ δ' ἀναισθητοῦν οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς.

Just like mention of those beings who are blessed and imperishable is Principal Doctrine 1 and foremost here in the Letter, the idea of "death is nothing to us" is placed next in the Doctrines and here. Epicurus is consistent in what he sees as important.

124h. ὅθεν γνῶσις ὀρθὴ τοῦ μηθὲν εἶναι πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὸν θάνατον ἀπολαυστὸν ποιεῖ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς θνητόν,...

- ὅθεν "wherefore, for this reason"
- γνῶσις "knowledge" (gnōsis, Compare English prognosis, prognostication)
- ὀρθὴ "right, correct, straight, sound"
 - (orthē) < orthos Compare English orthopedic, orthodontist, orthodox
 - So, "sound knowledge, correct understanding" I find it interesting - though not necessarily significant - that this could easily be the Greek translation of the first of the Buddhist Eightfold Path "Right Understanding."
- μηθὲν "one, not even one, nobody" (also in 123c)
- πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὸν θάνατον "for us, death..."
- ἀπολαυστὸν "enjoyed, enjoyable"
- ποιεῖ "(it) makes"
- τὸ τῆς ζωῆς θνητόν,..."the mortality of life"
 - θνητόν literally "susceptible to death"

So, ὅθεν γνῶσις ὀρθὴ τοῦ μηθὲν εἶναι πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὸν θάνατον... "Therefore, correct understanding is that death is nothing for us..."

¹⁶ *The Principal Doctrines* is the summary of the important primary beliefs of the Epicurean school, possibly composed by Epicurus or other early Epicureans. The text is preserved by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* as the final section of Book X which is itself dedicated to Epicurus.

ἀπολαυστὸν ποιεῖ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς θνητόν,... "this is what makes the mortality of life enjoyable,..."

124i. οὐκ ἄπειρον προστιθεῖσα χρόνον, ἀλλὰ τὸν τῆς ἀθανασίας ἀφελομένη πόθον.

- οὐκ προστιθεῖσα "not bringing upon, not gaining"
- ἄπειρον literally, ἄ "not" + πειρον "end, limit" therefore ἄπειρον "without limit, unlimited, endless"
- χρόνον (khronon) "time (in the abstract sense), a lifetime."
 - English chronology, chronometer
 - So, ἄπειρον χρόνον "endless lifetime, unlimited time" could be paraphrased "immortality" although let's leave the phrase intact.
- οὐκ ἄπειρον προστιθεῖσα χρόνον "not gaining an endless lifetime for oneself..."
- ... ἀλλὰ "but" ...

τὸν τῆς ἀθανασίας ἀφελομένη πόθον.

- ἀθανασίας "immortality, not dying" (< ἄ "not" + θάνατος "death")
- τὸν τῆς ἀθανασίας πόθον "the longing, yearning, love of immortality"
- ἀφελομένη "took/takes away"
- "... but takes away the yearning for endless time."

Which brings us to the end of verse 124. Let's reconnect the dots. Remember that the 124a-d finished the topic in 123.

Our literal translation:

For what they believe are not prolepses, but rather the judgements of the hoi polloi concerning the gods which are false, hasty assumptions. So, they believe the greatest evils are brought to the wicked from the gods as well as the greatest aid to the good, because the hoi polloi are believing that the gods accept those who resemble themselves who are similar through all excellences and goodness; all those not of their sort are strange and alien.

Furthermore, accustom yourself in believing that, for us, death is nothing since all pleasure and pain are in perception of the senses and the mind, and death is the absolute negation of perception. So, correct understanding is that death is nothing for us, and this is what makes the mortality of life enjoyable: not gaining an endless lifetime for oneself but taking away the yearning for not dying or immortality.

Verse 125

With verse 125, we finish up the topic of the Epicurean attitude toward death.

Bailey 125. οὐθὲν γάρ ἐστιν ἐν τῷ ζῆν δεινὸν τῷ κατειληφότι γνησίως τὸ μηθὲν ὑπάρχειν ἐν τῷ μὴ ζῆν δεινόν. ὥστε μάταιος ὁ λέγων δεδιέναι τὸν θάνατον οὐχ ὅτι λυπήσει παρών, ἀλλ' ὅτι λυπεῖ μέλλον. ὁ γὰρ παρὸν οὐκ ἐνοχλεῖ, προσδοκώμενον κενῶς λυπεῖ. τὸ φρικωδέστατον οὖν τῶν κακῶν ὁ θάνατος οὐθὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἐπειδήπερ ὅταν μὲν ἡμεῖς ὦμεν, ὁ θάνατος οὐ πάρεστιν· ὅταν δ' ὁ θάνατος παρῇ, τότε ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμέν. οὔτε οὖν πρὸς τοὺς ζῶντάς ἐστιν οὔτε πρὸς τοὺς τετελευτηκότας, ἐπειδήπερ περὶ οὓς μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν, οἱ δ' οὐκέτι εἰσίν.

Ἀλλ' οἱ πολλοὶ τὸν θάνατον ὅτε μὲν ὡς μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν φεύγουσιν, ὅτε δὲ ὡς ἀνάπαυσιν τῶν ἐν τῷ ζῆν <κακῶν ποθοῦσιν.

125a. οὐθὲν γάρ ἐστιν ἐν τῷ ζῆν δεινὸν τῷ κατειληφότι γνησίως τὸ μηθὲν ὑπάρχειν ἐν τῷ μὴ ζῆν δεινόν.

- As usual, we'll use the generic "because, since" for γάρ.
- οὐθὲν γάρ ἐστιν "because nothing is..." Let's find out what is *nothing*...
- ἐν τῷ ζῆν literal: "in living" and ἐν τῷ μὴ ζῆν literal, "in not living" again illustrate the parallel writing style of Epicurus.
- δεινόν "terrible, horrible, fearful"
 - Recall that δεινόν is the word used in the fourth line of the Tetrapharmakos to refer to refer to pain: τὸ δὲ δεινὸν εὐκαρτέρητον "The terrible can be easily endured."
 - English dinosaur "terrible lizard")
- So far then: "because nothing is terrible in living... (μηθὲν "nothing") terrible in not living..."
- ὑπάρχειν We encountered this word all the way back in verse 122 and it carries the sense of "beginning to do something" but it can also mean "the fact is that..." (start from the facts, so to speak)
- τῷ κατειληφότι γνησίως "for the one truly/really **comprehending**..."
 - Comprehending what?

"... that the fact is that there is nothing terrible (nothing to be feared) in not living."

125a gives us, in a literal translation:

οὐθὲν γάρ ἐστιν ἐν τῷ ζῆν δεινὸν τῷ κατειληφότι γνησίως τὸ μηθὲν ὑπάρχειν ἐν τῷ μὴ ζῆν δεινόν.

"For there is nothing terrible in living for the one who truly comprehends that there is nothing terrible in not living."

125b. ὥστε μάταιος ὁ λέγων δεδιέναι τὸν θάνατον οὐχ ὅτι λυπήσει παρών, ἀλλ' ὅτι λυπεῖ μέλλον.

- ὥστε "(the result being)" (not necessarily translated)
- μάταιος "vain, empty, foolish" From μάτη "fault, folly"
- δεδιέναι "to fear"
 - ὥστε μάταιος ὁ λέγων δεδιέναι τὸν θάνατο
 - "So, the one who says death is to be feared is foolish/at fault..."
- οὐχ ὅτι λυπήσει παρών,...
- λυπήσει "will be pained, distressed, sad"
- παρών "being present, being ready at hand"
 - οὐχ ὅτι λυπήσει παρών "not that there will be pain, distress when present"
- ἀλλ' ὅτι λυπεῖ μέλλον. "but that there is pain in anticipation." (Remember μέλλον < μέλλω had the sense of intention/anticipation, being about to do something.)

125c. ὁ γὰρ παρὸν οὐκ ἐνοχλεῖ, προσδοκώμενον κενῶς λυπεῖ.

- ἐνοχλεῖ "troubles, disquiets, annoys"
 - [γὰρ] ὁ παρὸν οὐκ ἐνοχλεῖ, "because that which is present does not trouble, disquiet, annoy"
- προσδοκώμενον κενῶς λυπεῖ.
 - "Expecting (or anticipating) pains [one] (or distresses [one]) fruitlessly."
- κενῶς is the adverbial form of κενός (kenos) which is common in Epicurus's writings in contexts such as void in "atoms and void" and "groundless desires." This is a word that carries a wide range of connotations, but all have that sense of emptiness, void, no ground to stand on (literally and figuratively). It carries the physical connotation of an empty box. If a box is κενός, it would be possible to move your hand around in it. There's nothing there to impede your movement.

125d. τὸ φρικωδέστατον οὖν τῶν κακῶν ὁ θάνατος οὐθὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς,

- τὸ φρικωδέστατον "That which causes utter horror, causes one to shudder" This word is connected to τῶν κακῶν "of evils, of pains (from an Epicurean perspective)" and stands in apposition to ὁ θάνατος "death", both of which we've seen before.
- οὖν
 - then (implying temporal sequence)
 - therefore (implying causal sequence)
 - Marker of the continuation of a previously interrupted line of thought: "As I was saying..."
 - Added to indefinite pronoun or adverb, such as ὅστισοῦν (hostisoûn), to make it more general: whoever, whatever; whosoever

So, 125d. τὸ φρικωδέστατον οὖν τῶν κακῶν ὁ θάνατος οὐθὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς,

"Death, that most utterly horrifying of pains [*as it is understood by the hoi polloi*] then is nothing to us."

Possibly a good way to get this across would be "scare quotes" as in *Death, the "most utterly horrifying of pains," then is nothing to us,...*

125e. ἐπειδὴ περ ὅταν μὲν ἡμεῖς ὦμεν, ὁ θάνατος οὐ πάρεστιν·

- ἐπειδὴ "after, since"
- περ (a particle that follows the word it modifies and adds force to it)
- ὅταν "whenever, when"
- ἡμεῖς ὦμεν "we are" (first-person plural present active *subjunctive*)
- πάρεστιν "is ready at hand, is present" (third-person singular present active *indicative*)

So, 125e. ἐπειδὴ περ ὅταν **μὲν** ἡμεῖς ὦμεν, ὁ θάνατος οὐ πάρεστιν:

"**On the one hand**, at the time when we are, death is not present;..." That is, when we exist, death is not present. While we live, we're not dead!

125f. ὅταν δ' ὁ θάνατος παρῇ, τόθ' ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμέν.

"**On the other hand**, whenever death is present, then we are not." That is, once we die, we no longer exist!

You can compare Epicurus's clever wordsmithing by comparing the parallel phrasing he uses in 125e and 125f:

- πάρεστιν > παρῇ (third-person singular present active *subjunctive*)
- ὦμεν > οὐκ ("not") ἐσμέν (first-person plural present active *indicative*)

Note that the indicative and subjunctive have switched places between 125e and f.

125g. οὔτε οὖν πρὸς τοὺς ζῶντάς ἐστιν οὔτε πρὸς τοὺς τετελευτηκότας,...

Here we again meet our friends **οὔτε... οὔτε...** "Neither... Nor..."

"Neither *for those who are living* nor *for those whose lives are ended*,..."

- τοὺς ζῶντάς "those who are living" (related to ζῶον, zoology, etc.)
- τοὺς τετελευτηκότας "those who have died, who have finished life, those who have accomplished the task." (from τελευτάω)
 - Trivia: τετελεσται "It is finished/completed/accomplished" is the last thing Jesus said on the cross according to John 19:30.

125h. ἐπειδὴ περ περὶ οὓς μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν, οἱ δ' οὐκέτι εἰσίν.

- περὶ (with accusative) "around, near, about"
- οὓς "who, which, that" (masculine accusative 3d person plural)
 - "not for those who are, as well as not for those who are no more."

125i. Ἀλλ' οἱ πολλοὶ τὸν θάνατον ὅτε μὲν ὡς μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν φεύγουσιν,

- 125j. ὁτὲ **δὲ** ὥς **ἀνάπαισιν** τῶν ἐν τῷ ζῆν <κακῶν ποθοῦσιν>.

- And this brings us to the end of another verse. Let's recap 125 with our full literal translation:

But the hoi polloi, on the one hand, flee from death as if it is the greatest evil, then, on the other hand, on the other hand, they desire for themselves an ending of the evil (pain) in living.

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Verse 126

Verse 126 continues the thoughts from the previous verse.

Bailey: 126: ὁ δὲ σοφὸς οὔτε παραιτεῖται τὸ ζῆν > οὔτε φοβεῖται τὸ μὴ ζῆν· οὔτε γὰρ αὐτῷ προσίσταται τὸ ζῆν οὔτε δοξάζεται κακὸν εἶναι τὸ μὴ ζῆν. ὥσπερ δὲ σιτίον οὐ τὸ πλεῖον πάντως ἀλλὰ τὸν ἡδιστον αἰρεῖται, οὕτω καὶ χρόνον οὐ τὸν μήκιστον ἀλλὰ τὸν ἡδιστον καρπίζεται.

Ὁ δὲ παραγγέλλων τὸν μὲν νέον καλῶς ζῆν, τὸν δὲ γέροντα καλῶς καταστρέφειν εὐήθης ἐστὶν οὐ μόνον διὰ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς ἀσπαστόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὸ τὴν αὐτὴν εἶναι μελέτην τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν καὶ τοῦ καλῶς ἀποθνήσκειν. πολλὸ δὲ χεῖρων καὶ ὁ λέγων καλὸν μὲν μὴ φῶναι.

Φύντα δ' ὅπως ὄκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι.

126a. ὁ δὲ σοφὸς οὔτε παραιτεῖται τὸ ζῆν > οὔτε φοβεῖται τὸ μὴ ζῆν·

Then the wise one (sage) neither begs/craves living nor fears not living;

126b. οὔτε γὰρ αὐτῷ προσίσταται τὸ ζῆν οὔτε δοξάζεται κακὸν εἶναι τὸ μὴ ζῆν.

- Neither to set oneself against living
- Nor to think, suppose, imagine it is evil to not live

126c. ὥσπερ δὲ σιτίον οὐ τὸ πλεῖον πάντως ἀλλὰ τὸν ἡδιστον αἰρεῖται,

- ὥσπερ "like, as, even, just"
- τό σιτίον "grain; food (made from grain), bread; food in general (as in "*food* and drink" σιτιον και ποτά) See below for more discussion.
- τὸ πλεῖον "more/most" (comparative degree of πολὺς "many" - see 'hoi polloi' above)
- πάντως "in all ways, at all events" (all the time)
 - Note the πάν- "all, every" again
- ἀλλὰ "but"
- τὸ ἡδιστον "the most pleasant"
- αἰρεῖται "is chosen/choosing"

126d. οὕτω καὶ χρόνον οὐ τὸν μήκιστον ἀλλὰ τὸν ἡδιστον καρπίζεται.

126c and 126d exemplify again why it's important to look at the words Epicurus used and not just modern English translations. Take a look at the final phrases of each:

126c. ...ἀλλὰ τὸ ἡδιστον αἰρεῖται,

"choosing that which brings the greatest pleasure"

126d. ...ἀλλὰ τὸν ἡδιστον καρπίζεται.

"enjoying the fruits of that which bring the greatest pleasure."

Both of these use the word ἡδίστον (hēdiston) which is the superlative of ἡδύς (hēdus)¹⁸ "pleasant, sweet" which is related to ἡδονή (hēdonē) "pleasure". By variously translating these two occurrences of the same exact word as "most pleasing/brings the greatest joy," "most delicious/happiest," "nicest/most agreeable," or "most enjoyable" (for both), the fact that Epicurus used the *same* word is lost. Only Yonge uses "most pleasant" for both. Epicurus teaches that pleasure is the greatest good and by refusing to translate words like ἡδίστον more literally as "(that which) brings the most pleasure" it would appear that translators are consciously shying away from acknowledging that pleasure was Epicurus's North Star. When Epicurus says pleasure, he means pleasure. Translators should not equivocate or obfuscate. They should strive to illuminate and communicate.

Several other words from 126c and d are worth noting:

- μήκιστον "longest, greatest, tallest"
- καρπίζεται (karpizetai) "enjoy the fruits of pleasure"
 - Related to Latin carpo as in *carpe diem* "pluck/harvest the day")
- and σιτίον...

The word σιτίον is interesting in that it refers to grain, food made from grain, or food in general (as opposed to drink). In context, it makes more sense to see it in this general connotation. Verse 131 mentions bread specifically and, in fact, a specific kind of bread (μάζα (maza)). If Epicurus wanted to say bread specifically here in 126, he could have stated it explicitly. From my reading, the best translation in this context in 126 is "food." The σιτίον, along with wine (or possibly water), could constitute a whole meal; however, it was often accompanied by ὄψον "cooked or otherwise prepared food" as well as "relishes" or "delicacies" like olives, vegetables, cheese, meat, and fish. However, the common meal was some kind of bread along with that wine or water. These points will become important again when we discuss Verse 131.

126e. Ὁ δὲ παραγγέλλων τὸν μὲν νέον καλῶς ζῆν, τὸν δὲ γέροντα καλῶς καταστρέφειν εὐήθης ἐστὶν οὐ μόνον διὰ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς ἀσπαστόν,

- ὁ παραγγέλλων "the one who orders, recommends, exhorts; encourages, summons" Remember that Epicurus uses the related word παρήγγελλον back in 123 to "exhort" Menoikeus to study. Here, he's contrasting himself, who summons one to right understanding, with someone calling you to foolish ideas.
 - παραγγέλλων is related to ἄγγελος (angelos) from which English angel "messenger" is derived

¹⁸ LSJ Lexicon entry at Perseus Digital Library:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=h%28%2Fdiston&la=greek&can=h%28%2Fdiston1&prior=to\n&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0257:book=10:chapter=1&i=2#lexicon>

[μὲν] τὸν νέον **καλῶς** ζῆν "[the one who exhorts,] on the one hand, for the one who is young to live **nobly** (see various meanings of καλῶς in 123a above).

[δὲ] τὸν γέροντα **καλῶς** καταστρέφειν εὐήθης "and, on the other hand, *the one who is old* to come to an end (to die) **nobly**"

- Note καταστρέφειν (katastrephein) is the origin of English catastrophe.

Most translators call the "one who is exhorting" (the παραγγέλλον) "foolish" and choosing that as the English word for εὐήθης. LSJ gives a little more nuance to the meaning:

- good-hearted.
- in bad sense, simple, silly
 - simpleton; εὐηθές [ἐστι] c. inf., it is simple, foolish, absurd

So, just using the word "foolish" doesn't get at the good-hearted nature of the "simpleton" in this case. The παραγγέλλον is a good-hearted "fool" in the classical sense, but completely lacking in enough information to do any good. Their argument is silly, foolish, and absurd because of their false opinions and beliefs. And you can't really blame the fool. All you can do is shake your head and try to steer them in a better direction with sound information. This is in stark contrast to Epicurus's exhortation which is founded on sound information.

It is helpful to consider the opposite of εὐήθης (literally, "good-character"): κακοήθης (literally, "evil/bad-character"):

- (of humans and animals) ill-disposed, malicious
- (of humans) thinking evil; given to the worst disposition for a situation
- (of things) infamous, abominable
- (medicine, of sores, fevers, diseases) malignant

Note also that this simple fool is the opposite of the wise one (ὁ σοφὸς) spoken of earlier in verse 126, setting up those contrasts and comparisons that Epicurus likes to make. So, don't fall into the trap of "simple" translations.

This section ends with:

οὐ μόνον ἀ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς **ἀσπαστόν**,...

"**not uniquely or only** because of the '**welcoming-ness**' of living,..."

Or maybe better "because life is **to be welcomed**,..."

The second reason that this is a foolish position to espouse is spelled out in 126f:

126f. ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὸ τὴν αὐτὴν εἶναι μελέτην τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν καὶ τοῦ καλῶς ἀποθνήσκειν.

- ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ "but also because"

The rest takes a little parsing.

τὸ τὴν αὐτὴν εἶναι μελέτην τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν καὶ τοῦ καλῶς ἀποθνήσκειν.

There are a number of embedded phrases here:

- τὴν αὐτὴν εἶναι "is the same" (αὐτὴν < αὐτός with τὴν (the definite article) in front means "the same")
- τὸ μελέτην ...See below for commentary on this.
- τοῦ καλῶς ζῆν "to live nobly/καλῶς"
- καὶ "and"
- τοῦ καλῶς ἀποθνήσκειν "to die nobly/καλῶς"

τὸ μελέτην is related to 122g and 123a's μελετᾶν and carries the sense of attending to something, studying it, or mediating on it. The word here specifically refers to an exercise or practice. It connotes a rehearsal or even military exercises or drills.

So, a literal translation could be "but also because the practice of living well/nobly/beautifully (καλῶς) and (the practice of) dying well/nobly/beautifully (καλῶς) are the same."

Which brings us to the last section of verse 126 where Epicurus directly quotes - word for word - from the Elegiac Poems of Theognis^{19 20}

Theognis, lines 425-428:

"The best lot of all for man is never to have been born nor seen the beams of the burning Sun; this failing, to pass the gates of Hades as soon as one may, and lie under a goodly heap of earth."

In Greek:

πάντων μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον

μηδ' ἐσιδεῖν αὐγάς ὀξέος ἡελίου:

φύντα δ' ὅπως ὥκιστα πύλας Ἀἴδαο περῆσαι καὶ κεῖσθαι πολλὴν γῆν ἐπαμυσάμενον.

Now, compare that red highlighted section from Theognis to line 126g in the Letter to Menoikeus:

126g. πολὺ δὲ χεῖρων καὶ ὁ λέγων καλὸν μὲν μὴ φῦναι, Φύντα δ' ὅπως ὥκιστα πύλας Ἀἴδαο περῆσαι.

¹⁹ "The Elegiac Poems of Theognis." *Elegy and Iambus*. with an English Translation by. J. M. Edmonds. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press. London. William Heinemann Ltd. 1931. Vol. 1. (Source: Perseus Digital Library)

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0479%3Avolume%3D1%3Atext%3D11%3Asection%3D2>

²⁰ Wikipedia article for Theognis of Megara: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theognis_of_Megara

Those seven words of Epicurus's are clearly meant to be a quote. He paraphrases the first section about it being good to not have been born at all, then quotes Theognis to bring it on home. Theognis calls it ἄριστον "the best" to not have been born; Epicurus simply says that "they say it is καλός." With this being the case then, my recommendation would be to always translate that phrase within "quotation marks" to emphasize Epicurus's erudition and awareness of the common sayings of his day.

Let's continue our parsing.

- μὴ φῦναι "not to be born; not to be descended from anyone"
- πολὺ δὲ χεῖρον καὶ ὁ λέγων "and also far worse (is) the one who says..." So, Epicurus is contrasting the one who says this with the simpleton from the previous lines.
- καλὸν μὲν μὴ φῦναι, "on the one hand, it is good/kalōn (καλός) not to be born,"
- Then comes the word-for-word quote from Theognis: φύντα δ' ὅπως ὤκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι.

What's convenient about the quote is that it incorporates the follow-up δε (δ') from μὲν in the previous phrase. This line is usually translated something like:

"Failing this [i.e., having been born in the first place], to pass through (περῆσαι) the gates of Hades (πύλας Αἴδαο) as soon as possible (ὤκιστα "most swiftly")."

Which brings us to the end of verse 126!

Let's pull together our work on this verse with our literal translation:

So then, the wise one neither begs nor craves for living nor fears not living: Neither to set oneself against living, nor to imagine that it is evil to not live. Just as the most food is not chosen but that which brings the greatest pleasure; choose as well not the longest time but that in which one enjoys the fruits of that which bring the greatest pleasure.

So, the one who exhorts, on the one hand, for the one who is young to live nobly; and, on the other hand, the one who is old to come to an end nobly is a good-hearted simpleton not only because life is to be welcomed but also because the practice of living well, nobly, and beautifully and the practice of dying well, nobly, and beautifully are the same. But far worse is the one who says, on the one hand, it is well not to be born; or, on the other hand,

"failing this, to pass through the gates of Hades as soon as possible."

Verse 127

Bailey: 127. Εἰ μὲν γὰρ πεποιθὼς τοῦτό φησι, πῶς οὐκ ἀπέρχεται τοῦ ζῆν; ἐν ἐτοίμῳ γὰρ αὐτῷ τοῦτ' ἔστιν, εἴ περ ἦν βεβουλευμένον αὐτῷ βεβαίως· εἰ δὲ μωκώμενος, μάταιος ἐν τοῖς οὐκ ἐπιδεχομένοις.

Μνημονευτέον δὲ ὡς τὸ μέλλον οὔτε ἡμέτερον οὔτε πάντως οὐχ ἡμέτερον, ἵνα μήτε πάντως προσμένωμεν ὡς ἐσόμενον μήτε ἀπελπίζωμεν ὡς πάντως οὐκ ἐσόμενον.

Ἀναλογιστέον δὲ ὡς τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι φυσικαί, αἱ δὲ κεναί, καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν αἱ μὲν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μόνον· τῶν δ' ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν.

127a. Εἰ **μὲν** γὰρ πεποιθὼς τοῦτό φησι, πῶς οὐκ ἀπέρχεται τοῦ ζῆν;

- πεποιθὼς, (opp. μωκώμενος in jest, used below in 127c). perfect active participle of πείθω: convincing, persuading, succeeding through entreaty.
- φησι "he/she says/asserts"
- πῶς "how?" Could be paraphrased as "explain to me how this could be?, Answer me this..." etc.
- ἀπέρχεται (3rd p singular indicative) "depart from" τοῦ ζῆν "life"
- "If, on the one hand, because he/she asserts this is convincing (or persuading), explain why he/she does not depart from living?"

127b. ἐν ἐτοίμῳ γὰρ αὐτῷ τοῦτ' ἔστιν, εἴ περ ἦν βεβουλευμένον αὐτῷ βεβαίως·

- [γὰρ] ἐν ἐτοίμῳ αὐτῷ τοῦτ' ἔστιν, "[for] this is readily at hand, ..."
- εἴπερ ἦν βεβουλευμένον αὐτῷ βεβαίως:
 - εἴπερ "if indeed, if really" This is a strengthened or fortified version of εἴ "if"
 - βεβουλευμένον "resolving oneself, determining for oneself"
 - βεβαίως "constantly, without interruption"
 - "if indeed one is constantly resolving for oneself,"
 - "if indeed/really was taking counsel with oneself, deliberating constantly with oneself;

127c. εἰ **δὲ** μωκώμενος, μάταιος ἐν τοῖς οὐκ ἐπιδεχομένοις.

- **[δὲ]** εἰ μωκώμενος
 - μωκώμενος in jest, opposite of πεποιθὼς in 127a, setting up another of Epicurus's contrasts.
 - "If, on the other hand, (this is said) in jest,"
- μάταιος ἐν τοῖς οὐκ ἐπιδεχομένοις.
 - Note that μάταιος is the same word used in 125 to describe the person who says "death is to be feared"

- ἐν τοῖς οὐκ ἐπιδεχομένοις. "in not allowing or admitting to this."
- ἐπιδέχομαι "to admit besides or in addition: to allow of, admit of"
- The Epicurus Wiki had a good paraphrase of this line: "If, on the other hand (he says so) joking, (he speaks) foolishly [about] things that [do not] allow (for jokes)"

So, 127a-c:

εἰ μὲν γὰρ πεποιθὼς τοῦτό φησι, πῶς οὐκ ἀπέρχεται τοῦ ζῆν; ἐν ἐτοίμῳ γὰρ αὐτῷ τοῦτ' ἔστιν, εἴπερ ἦν βεβουλευμένον αὐτῷ βεβαίως: εἰ δὲ μωκώμενος, μάταιος ἐν τοῖς οὐκ ἐπιδεχομένοις.

"On the one hand, if what they say is persuasive, how does one not depart from life (kill themselves)? For this is readily at hand, if indeed one was to resolve oneself steadfastly to this. If, on the other hand, this is in jest, one is foolish for making fun of things which do not admit of this."

127d. Μνημονευτέον δὲ ὡς τὸ μέλλον οὔτε ἡμέτερον οὔτε πάντως οὐχ ἡμέτερον,

- Μνημονευτέον "one must remember"
- τὸ μέλλον "that which is to come"
- πάντως "entirely"
 - Note the πᾶν (pan) relating to English pan- "all, every"
- ἡμέτερον "ours"

"Also, one must remember like/as that which is to come is neither ours nor by no means not ours,..."

Although this sounds Stoic, this was not an uncommon sentiment throughout ancient Greek culture.

127e. ἵνα μήτε πάντως προσμένωμεν ὡς ἐσόμενον μήτε ἀπελπίζωμεν ὡς πάντως οὐκ ἐσόμενον.

- ἵνα "that, so that"
- ἐσόμενον "will be being"

Let's break down those **μήτε... μήτε** "neither/nor" phrases:

- μήτε πάντως προσμένωμεν ὡς ἐσόμενον
- μήτε ἀπελπίζωμεν ὡς πάντως οὐκ ἐσόμενον.

There's a lot that's the same in those two phrases, so let's concentrate on the two words that are the primary difference:

- προσμένωμεν
- ἀπελπίζωμεν

προσμένωμεν - first person plural subjunctive of προσμένω "I bide or await longer, I wait for". The subjunctive sets up a contingency or doubt or desire. English typically uses words like might, would, should or qualifiers to get the idea across. προσμένωμεν could then be literally translated as something like "were we to wait longer" or "if we were to wait longer."

ἀπελπίζωμεν - first person plural subjunctive of ἀπελπίζω "I give up in despair; I despair." So, "were we to give up in despair" or "if we were to give up in despair."

To put it colloquially, the subjunctive is basically saying "this isn't currently the case but, we're just saying, were this to happen..." etc.

Now, let's look at the words in common:

- ὥς
 - ὥς has a lot of uses. Since ἐσόμενον is a participle, it means to give the reason or motive of the action expressed by the verb as in "if, as"
- πάντως "in all points, entirely, wholly" as above in 127d.
- (οὐκ) ἐσόμενον
 - Ἐσόμενον is the masculine singular of the future middle participle of εἶμι "to be; exist; (of persons) live; (of events) to happen." So, we can translate ἐσόμενον as something like "that which will be."
 - οὐκ is simply a negation: "not."

So, to revisit our phrases:

ἵνα μήτε πάντως προσμένωμεν ὥς ἐσόμενον

"So that neither, entirely, were we to wait longer - for 'that which will be'"

μήτε ἀπελπίζωμεν ὥς πάντως οὐκ ἐσόμενον.

"Nor were we to despair entirely for 'that which is not to be'"

127f. Αναλογιστέον δὲ ὥς τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι φυσικαί, αἱ δὲ κεναί,

- Αναλογιστέον "consider..."
- τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν "of the desires, yearnings"
 - "Consider then of the desires, on the one hand, are the φυσικαί "natural ones"
 - φυσικαί (physikai)
 - English physical, physics
 - on the other, the κεναί 'empty, fruitless, vain, void ones.'
 - κεναί is also again the word used when Epicurus talks about atoms and void.

127g. καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν αἱ μὲν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μόνον·

- "And of the natural ones, on the one hand, are the necessities; on the other hand, the natural ones only."
 - ἀναγκαῖαι "necessary, essential; (if a plural noun as here) necessities"

127h. τῶν δ' ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι,

- "then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, there are those necessary for eudaimonia;

Those necessary for eudaimonia are open to interpretation but must be based on Epicurus's philosophy.

127i. αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν.

- ἀοχλησία "freedom from disturbance"
- σώματος genitive singular of σῶμα
 - σῶμα "the body; one's material body or existence"
- "then, those [necessary] for the freedom from disturbance for the body; then those [necessary] for life itself."

There are some translations that interpret αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν to mean only things like clothing and shelter - those things that provide "freedom from disturbance" for the body, that is for one's physical existence. That isn't literally what is written so that is simply one interpretation. Those kinds of things - clothing and shelter - would seem to fall under the final category of those necessary for life. So, this category should catch those between eudaimonia and those necessary for life. This is an interesting category.

I would contend that those "necessary for life itself" are those essentials at the base of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: food, water, shelter, sleep, air, etc. Again, clothing and shelter would seem to fall into this category.

Which brings us to the end of another verse. Here is our literal translation of verse 127:

On the one hand, if what they say is persuasive, how does one not depart from life? For this is readily at hand, if indeed one was to resolve oneself steadfastly to this. If, on the other hand, this is in jest, one is foolish for making fun of things which do not admit of this.

Also, one must remember that "that which is to come" is neither ours nor by no means not ours, neither by our waiting a little longer for "that which will be" nor giving up in desiring altogether "that which will be not be."

Furthermore, on the one hand, there are the natural desires; on the other, the 'empty, fruitless, or vain ones.' And of the natural ones, on the one hand, are the necessary ones; on the other, the

ones which are only natural; then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, those necessary for eudaimonia; then, those necessary for the freedom from disturbance for the body; then those necessary for life itself.

Verse 128

Bailey: 128. τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανῆς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἵρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν <τῆς ψυχῆς> ἀταραξίαν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἐστὶ τέλος. τούτου γὰρ χάριν πάντα πράττομεν, ὅπως μήτε ἀλγῶμεν μήτε ταρβῶμεν. ὅταν δ' ἅπαξ τοῦτο περὶ ἡμᾶς γένηται, λύεται πᾶς ὁ τῆς ψυχῆς χειμῶν, οὐκ ἔχοντος τοῦ ζῶου βαδίζειν ὡς πρὸς ἐνδέον τι καὶ ζητεῖν ἕτερον ὅ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀγαθὸν συμπληρωθήσεται. τότε γὰρ ἡδονῆς χρεῖαν ἔχομεν, ὅταν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ παρεῖναι τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλγῶμεν· <ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἀλγῶμεν>, οὐκέτι τῆς ἡδονῆς δεόμεθα. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν.

We, of course, have to break this up into bite-size pieces to digest what's being conveyed here...

128a. τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανῆς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἵρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν <τῆς ψυχῆς> ἀταραξίαν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἐστὶ τέλος.

We need to break this down a little more, so...

128a.i. τούτων **γὰρ** ἀπλανῆς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἵρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν

- τούτων (genitive plural of οὗτος "this") "of these"
- ἀπλανῆς "not wandering, steady, fixed"
- θεωρία "consideration, theory, speculation; contemplation"
 - This word shows up in the characteristics of the sage in Diogenes Laertius, Book X.120: The sage will also enjoy themselves more than others in contemplation, speculation, and theorizing²¹
- πᾶσαν αἵρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν "all choice and flight/escape"
- ἐπανάγω
 - to bring up: to stir up, excite
 - to draw back an army
 - to bring back to the point
 - intransitive: to withdraw, retreat
- οἶδεν - third-person singular perfect active indicative of οἶδα (oîda) with movable nu (ν) at the end.
 - "to know, be acquainted with"

A digression is in order on the phrase αἵρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν (haîresin (kai "and") phugēn). These are the words that Epicurus consistently uses to denote the decisions we make on what courses of action to follow after we have weighed the pains and pleasures inherent in the results of those actions.

²¹ <https://sites.google.com/view/epicureansage/enjoy-themselves-more-than-others-in-contemplation>

- αἵρεσιν, the accusative of αἵρεσις (hairesis), means "choice, selection." Interestingly, it is also the source of the English word "heresy" so prevalent in the history of religion. By the time the Christians were ascendant, that "ai" was moving from being pronounced something like "eye" to something like "eh" so we get a pronunciation of αἵρεσις more like <heresis>, eventually giving us our English word. Consider that the very act of "making a choice" not sanctioned by the predominant religion was punishable, often by death.
- φυγὴν, the accusative of φυγή, means "flight, retreat, escape."
- So, it's not just that we make choices and "avoidances," the traditional formula for this phrase. That has always seemed too timid to me. We either choose a course of action, or, if we determine it is too full of painful consequences, we flee or retreat from it. In fact, we escape from it to safety, to some safe harbor. That gives our decisions a sense of urgency lacking in the milquetoast word "avoid" as if we're stepping around a puddle.

So, Saint-Andre translates 128a.i. τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανῆς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἵρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν... as: "The steady contemplation of these facts enables you to understand everything that you accept or reject..."

We're going to take the phrases out of order for a moment and look at the end (the iv part) of 128a first before circling around to complete our examination.

128a.iv. ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἐστι τέλος. "... since *this* is the 'goal' of a 'blessed' life."

One word to examine here is τέλος (telos). It is often translated as "goal," but this falls far short of the implications of this word. We'll have the opportunity soon in verse 128 to take a closer look at this word in relation to ἀρχή (arkhē) "beginning." For now, consider this a teaser.

Another pivotal word here is μακαρίως which appears to have no certain etymology but seems possibly to be derived from the idea of being wealthy in a literal and/or figurative sense. The usual translation is something like "blessed, fortunate, wealthy, 'well-off'". That being said, "happy" or as Saint-Andre says "completely happy" doesn't, in my view, provide the overall sense of satisfaction or completeness conveyed by a word like μακαρίως. Keep in mind that this is a form of the exact word used to describe the "blessed" beings talked about in Principal Doctrine 1: Τὸ **μακάριον** καὶ ἄφθαρτον οὔτε αὐτὸ πράγματα ἔχει οὔτε ἄλλω παρέχει· ὥστε οὔτε ὀργαῖς οὔτε χάρισι συνέχεται· ἐν ἀσθενεῖ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον.

"That which is **blessed/completely happy/blissful and imperishable/indestructible** has no troubles itself nor causes troubles for others; as a consequence, it is affected by neither anger nor gratitude; because all this would be an indication of weakness/sickness/lack of strength."

That Doctrine's μακάριον is rarely translated as simply "happy" but rather "blissful" and other superlatives like that.^{22 23 24}

So, what is the τέλος "goal, fulfillment" of a "blessed" life given here? That came previously in our selection: τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀταραξίαν "the health of the body and the tranquility of the mind"

128a.ii. ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν "for the health of the body (our physical existence)"...

- σώματος see 127i above
- ὑγίειαν (see 123b) "health" (English hygiene)

128a.iii. καὶ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀταραξίαν, "and (for) the tranquility (lit., not + trouble/disturbance) of the psyche (our mental existence, our "soul" colloquially)"

This demonstrates that Epicurus was concerned with our *entire* existence: the well-being of both our physical (σώματος) and mental (ψυχῆς) health. By contemplating and following his philosophy, we come to understand that all our decisions of which actions to choose and from which actions to flee are going to affect whether our physical, material health and well-being are to be maintained or not and whether our minds are to be troubled or not.

It may be interesting to take a look at the connotation of ἀταραξία (ataraxia) here again. Ataraxia is a widespread term in both popular and academic writings on Epicurus's philosophy. Ataraxia and aponia, translated as "tranquility" and "freedom from pain," respectively, are sometimes held up as the only "goal" or only "Good" of Epicurus's philosophy. The two are referenced together only (to the best of my knowledge) in the (in)famous lines about katastematic and kinetic pleasures. Ataraxia and aponia are given as examples of one kind of pleasure (katastematic), and χαρά "joy" and εὐφροσύνη "mirth, merriment" are given as examples of the other kind (kinetic). Consider another instance of ἀταραξία in Fragment 519: "The greatest fruit of justice is serenity." (δικαιοσύνης καρπὸς μέγιστος ἀταραξία.) In parsing ἀταραξία itself, it's helpful to consider the opposite of ἀταραξία: ταραχή meaning "trouble, disorder, confusion." So, ἀταραξία conveys "without trouble, without disorder, without confusion." I've also seen it written that there's also the sense of calm seas, which I've always liked in light of Vatican Saying 163: "*Flee from all*

²²

<https://books.google.com/books?id=sPCwwxOwbXUC&pg=PA78&lpg=PA78&dq=greek+makar+etymology&source=bl&ots=cJV8i7NjuR&sig=7m0Yw6bGssTpWov8f-SCXsWU5ew&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj-rKa1nqXUAhXM64MKHRdJCq4Q6AEIOjAE#v=onepage&q=greek%20makar%20etymology&f=false>

²³ <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/allsaintb.htm>

²⁴ <https://www.studydrive.org/language-studies/greek-thoughts/index.cgi?a=38>

indoctrination, O blessed one, and hoist the sail of your own little boat." Αταραξία is a description of pleasure, a kind of pleasure. Epicurus repeatedly states that his "good" is pleasure writ large, and the goal of his philosophy is to lead the most pleasant life possible.

Additionally, the idea of a healthy body and an untroubled psyche is not uncommon in the ancient world, including "mens sana in corpore sano" or "a healthy mind in a healthy body" (per Juvenal, Satire X) or, according to Thales: "τίς εὐδαίμων, 'ὁ τὸ μὲν σῶμα ὑγίης, τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν εὖπορος, τὴν δὲ φύσιν εὐπαίδευτος" *"Who is happy? 'He who has a healthy body, a resourceful/ingenious mind, and a well-trained nature (disposition/personality)."*

128.b. τούτου γὰρ χάριν πάντα πράττομεν, ὅπως μήτε ἀλγῶμεν μήτε ταρβῶμεν.

Let's start breaking this down:

128.b.i. τούτου χάριν πάντα πράττομεν,

- τούτου "this"
- χάριν is a preposition (which takes the genitive case) "as a favor to..., for the pleasure of...; for the sake of..., because of..."
- πράττομεν "We practice/ do..."
 - We encountered this same word way back in 122g. Epicurean philosophy is about doing and practicing; it's not passive or just intellectual.
- "For the sake of this (i.e., health of the body and tranquility of the mind), we practice/do everything..."

128b.ii. ὅπως μήτε ἀλγῶμεν μήτε ταρβῶμεν.

- Note our familiar μήτε ... μήτε pair: "Neither... nor..."
- We've also encountered ὅπως "in order to" before as well, even in the Theognis quote. This has multiple connotations but can be thought of as introducing a statement of fact.
- ἀλγῶμεν (first person plural subjunctive) "if we were to feel bodily pain, to suffer hardship, to feel pain of mind"
- ταρβῶμεν (first person plural subjunctive) "if we were to be afraid, to dread"

128c. ὅταν δ' ἅπαξ τοῦτο περὶ ἡμᾶς γένηται,

"and so when once this has come into being near/around us..."

- περί (peri): English *perimeter* "measure around"
- γένηται 'third-person singular aorist middle subjunctive of γίγνομαι "come into being"

128d. λύεται πᾶς ὁ τῆς ψυχῆς χειμών,

"they set free all (πᾶς) the calamity, distress, suffering (χειμών) of the soul (ψυχῆς),..."

- χειμών has the connotation of cold and stormy winter weather. This word then takes on the metaphorical sense of calamity, distress, etc. When you read this word, imagine freezing blizzards, blinding snowfall, and howling wind!

128e. οὐκ ἔχοντος τοῦ ζῶου βαδίζειν ὡς πρὸς ἐνδέον τι καὶ ζητεῖν ἕτερον ὃ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀγαθὸν συμπληρωθήσεται.

- οὐκ ἔχοντος "not having, does not have"
- τοῦ ζῶου "the living being" genitive singular of ζῶον, the word we met way back in 123b in Epicurus's discussion of the gods. "A god" was described as a ζῶον. So, are we to take the word in 123b as "living being" there as the word implies here in 128b? Or is the ambiguous nature of the word still at play in the description of a god? The debate continues.
- βαδίζειν "to go about, to go, i.e., to go walking about..."
- ἐνδέον "in need of (a thing)" (lacking, deficient; inadequate, insufficient)
- ζητέω
 - to seek, search after, look for
 - to inquire into, examine, consider
 - to strive for, desire, wish
- τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀγαθὸν "the good (ἀγαθὸν) of the mind (ψυχῆς) and the body (σώματος)
 - Note the use yet again of ψυχῆς and σώματος, our mental and physical existence linked together
- "...seeing that the living being has no need to go in search of something that is lacking for the good of our mental and physical existence..."

128f. τότε γὰρ ἡδονῆς χρεῖαν ἔχομεν, ὅταν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ παρεῖναι τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλγῶμεν·

- τότε "then, at that time"
- χρεῖαν (accusative) "need, want, necessity"
 - "for then we have need of pleasure,"
- μὴ παρεῖναι "to not be by, to not be present"
- As in 128b. ἀλγῶμεν (first person plural subjunctive) "if we were to feel bodily pain, to suffer hardship, to feel pain of mind"
- "Because it is then that we need pleasure, if we were to be in pain from the pleasure not being present..."

128g. <ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἀλγῶμεν>, οὐκέτι τῆς ἡδονῆς δεόμεθα. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν.

- ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἀλγῶμεν,
 - "but if we were to not be in pain,"
- οὐκέτι "no more, no longer"

- δεόμεθα, here means "desire, beg for, ask for"; shows up in New Testament to convey "implore, pray for, etc."
 - "we no longer desire/beg for/ask for pleasure (τῆς ἡδονῆς)."
 - So, it's not that we "don't need" pleasure, it's that we don't desire it or beg for it like we do when it's not present. Why? Because when we are not in pain, we are full of pleasure. There is no need to seek or beg for pleasure when you have a full measure of pleasure.
- λέγομεν "we say"
 - "and that is why we say pleasure is **the foundation and fulfillment, the beginning and end** (ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος) of the blessed life."

A short digression is now in order to examine that phrase ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος "the foundation and fulfillment, the beginning and end." Often, this is simply translated as "the beginning and the end" as if there's a starting line and a finish line. This is much deeper than that, although the running of a race could be one metaphor that could be used. Let's first look at the word ἀρχὴν (accusative of ἀρχή).

- ἀρχή (arkhē)
 - English archeology "study of beginnings/origins" but also the -archy in monarchy, patriarchy, etc.

ἀρχή carries the meaning of beginning, origin, foundation, the farthest point. It even took on the meaning of "the corners of a sheet" by the time the New Testament was being written (Acts 10:11). It also had the connotation of the "beginning of power" residing in a ruler, the "most important person" in a kingdom. It carries the idea of a foundational element or first principle. The alpha (first letter of the Greek alphabet) to τέλος's omega (the last letter of the Greek alphabet) which is how Hicks translated them.

τέλος (telos) carries the meaning of endings, the goal, completion, maturity, result, fulfillment, consummation. Where ἀρχή is the foundation, τέλος is the highest point. The definition of τέλος in LSJ is extensive!²⁵

Αρχή is not quite as long but gives the nuance we're working with.²⁶

Therefore, to translate ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος as "beginning and end" (every other translation I've seen except Hicks) misses a lot of deeper meaning. This phrase is one that I highly recommend giving more attention to in one's personal translation or at least being aware of when reading. We miss so much by not examining Epicurus's words. Always go back to the texts!

And so we come to the close of verse 128. Time to recap:

²⁵ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=te/los>

²⁶ [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=a\)rxh/](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=a)rxh/)

The steady contemplation of these things equips one to know how to decide all choice and rejection for the health of the body and for the tranquility of the mind, that is for our physical and our mental existence, since this is the goal of a blessed life. For the sake of this, we do everything in order to neither be in bodily or mental pain nor to be in fear or dread; and so, when once this has come into being around us, it sets free all of the calamity, distress, and suffering of the mind, seeing that the living being has no need to go in search of something that is lacking for the good of our mental and physical existence. For it is then that we need pleasure, if we were to be in pain from the pleasure not being present; but if we were to not be in pain, we no longer desire or beg for pleasure. And this is why we say pleasure is the foundation and fulfillment of the blessed life.

Now, onto Verse 129...

Verse 129

Bailey 129. ταύτην γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἔγνωμεν, καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην καταντῶμεν ὡς κανόνι τῷ πάθει πᾶν ἀγαθὸν κρίνοντες.

Καὶ ἐπεὶ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο καὶ σύμφυτον, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ οὐ πᾶσαν ἡδονὴν αἰρούμεθα, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὅτε πολλὰς ἡδονὰς ὑπερβαίνομεν, ὅταν πλεῖον ἡμῖν τὸ δυσχερὲς ἐκ τούτων ἔπεται· καὶ πολλὰς ἀλγηδόνας ἡδονῶν κρείττους νομίζομεν, ἐπειδὴν μείζων ἡμῖν ἡδονὴ παρακολουθῇ πολὺν χρόνον ὑπομείνασι τὰς ἀλγηδόνας. πᾶσα οὖν ἡδονὴ διὰ τὸ φύσιν ἔχειν οἰκειὰν ἀγαθόν, οὐ πᾶσα μέντοι αἰρετὴ· καθάπερ καὶ ἀλγηδὼν πᾶσα κακόν, οὐ πᾶσα δὲ ἀεὶ φευκτὴ πεφυκυῖα.

129a. ταύτην γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἔγνωμεν,

- ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον "fundamental/primary good"
 - Remember πρῶτον from way back in 123b! Since it's used there and here, I contend that, in neither place, is it meant to convey "first" as an ordinal number but rather "fundamental, primary"
- συγγενικὸν from σύν (syn-) + γενικός (genikos) "congenital; kindred; things common and of our own nature"
 - σύν- "with, together"
 - syn/sum in English sympathy "feel together"; synthesis "place together"
 - γενικός "belonging to the clan, family; typical, principal; in kind"
- ἔγνωμεν (aorist "tense") "we perceived, we observed, we knew"
- "Because we perceived this (pleasure) as a fundamental good and akin to our nature"

129b. καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην καταντῶμεν ὡς κανόνι τῷ πάθει πᾶν ἀγαθὸν κρίνοντες.

Let's break this down just a little further:

129b.i. καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς

- καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης "and so, as a result of this,"
- καταρχόμεθα "we begin"
 - Note that this verb is in the middle voice which means it has a sense of doing something for one's own benefit
 - Also, its root is the same as ἀρχή in 128g!
- πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς "every choice and rejection" We've met this pair several times now. Remember φυγῆς carries the sense of flight, fleeing, and escape. It's not simply "avoiding" something like driving around a pothole.
- "and so, as a result of this (i.e., that pleasure is a fundamental good and common to our nature), we begin every choice and rejection..."

129b.ii. καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην καταντῶμεν ὡς κανόνι τῷ πάθει πᾶν ἀγαθὸν κρίνοντες.

- "and against this (ἐπὶ ταύτην)
- κανόνι τῷ πάθει "by the standard of feeling (i.e., pleasure and pain, the pathe)"; "by the standard of the reaction (singular) we have of pleasure or pain"
 - κανόνι (dative singular) < κᾶνών (kanōn) "canon, standard, measuring rod"
 - English canon (of literature), canonical
 - πάθει (dative singular) < πάθος
 - The dative singular appears to me to denote that we react with either pleasure or pain. You can only have one reaction to that which happens to you.
 - As Saint-Andre notes in his translation, the basic meaning of πάθος (pathos) - the word Epicurus uses to refer to "pleasure and pain" in the canon/standard (κανον) - is "that which happens to you." Due to that connotation, Saint-Andre renders it as "the standard of how that thing affects us." I see pain and pleasure as our reaction to how things affect us, so I would prefer something like "the standard of how we react to that which happens to us," but that's a little wordy.
- κρίνοντες "judging, deciding + (accusative" πᾶν ἀγαθὸν "every good thing," i.e., "every pleasure" against or by the κανόνι τῷ πάθει "the standard of how we react to what happens to us when we experience - or consider experiencing - that specific good thing.
- "And against this (that pleasure is a fundamental good and common to our nature), judging every good thing (i.e., every possible pleasurable experience) by the standard of how that pleasure affects us or how we react to considering experiencing that pleasure."

129c. Καὶ ἐπεὶ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο καὶ σύμφυτον,

- σύμφυτον "born with, congenital, natural, inborn", takes the place in this phrase of συγγενικὸν above (129a.)
- "And because this (pleasure) is the fundamental/primary and inborn good..."

129d. διὰ τοῦτο καὶ οὐ πᾶσαν ἡδονὴν αἰρούμεθα,

- αἰρούμεθα "we take for ourselves"
 - Many translators decide to simply use "choose" here, but Epicurus uses a first personal plural middle passive verb which conveys, to me, more of a sense of responsibility conveying the idea of "choosing for oneself"
- "And so this is why not every pleasure is chosen for ourselves"

129e. ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὅτε πολλὰς ἡδονὰς ὑπερβαίνομεν,

- ὑπερβαίνομεν "jump across, pass by"

- Note here as well that Epicurus doesn't use φυγῆς as in "choose or flee/reject/avoid." The word he decided to use is active. ὑπερβαίνομεν has connotations of stepping over the threshold of a house, crossing a boundary; intentionally leaving something out, or omitting something.
- "but this is the reason we pass by many pleasures,"

129f. ὅταν πλεῖον ἡμῖν τὸ δυσχερὲς ἐκ τούτων ἔπεται·

- πλεῖον "more, comparative degree of πολὺς"; "greater, more"
- ἡμῖν "for us"
- τὸ δυσχερὲς "unpleasant, troublesome thing"
- ἔπεται (subjunctive 3rd person singular) "were to result, follow, be a consequence of, etc"
- "When greater unpleasant things were to result for us:"

129g. καὶ πολλὰς ἀλγηδόνας ἡδονῶν κρείττους νομίζομεν,

- πολλὰς "many, a lot of"
- ἀλγηδόνας (genitive singular) "of physical or mental pain; grief, sorrow, sadness"
- ἡδονῶν (hedonon, genitive plural) "of pleasures"
- κρείττους "more powerful, better"
- νομίζομεν "we believe that"
- "and we think many pains better than pleasures"

129h. ἐπειδὴν μείζων ἡμῖν ἡδονὴ παρακολουθεῖ πολλὸν χρόνον ὑπομείνασι τὰς ἀλγηδόνας.

- ἐπειδὴν "whenever"
- μείζων (comparative degree of μέγας "big, great") "greater, larger, longer, taller, older"
- παρακολουθεῖ (subjunctive) "were to follow closely, were to accrue"
- χρόνον (khronon) "time"
 - English chrono- as in chronology, chronometer
- ὑπομείνασι "abide, wait patiently"
- "whenever greater pleasure were to follow for a longer time by patiently abiding the pain."

129i. πᾶσα οὖν ἡδονὴ διὰ τὸ φύσιν ἔχειν οἰκείαν ἀγαθόν, οὐ πᾶσα μέντοι αἰρετή·

- οἰκείαν literally, "in or of the house" connoting something familiar, belonging to oneself, being of one's nature, proper to a certain thing.
 - So, an οἰκείαν ἀγαθόν would be a good (ἀγαθόν) which is naturally our own, which belongs to us as something natural.
- So, all pleasure (πᾶσα... ἡδονή), through its nature, belongs to us as a good."
- ...however, not all are αἰρετή
 - αἰρετή (hairetē) "elected" (i.e., chosen, akin to the word used in "choice and 'avoidance'")

- “So, all pleasure, through its nature, belongs to us as a good; however, not all are chosen.”

129j. καθάπερ καὶ ἀλγηδὼν πᾶσα κακόν, οὐ πᾶσα δὲ ἀεὶ φευκτὴ πεφυκυῖα.

- καθάπερ καὶ ἀλγηδὼν πᾶσα κακόν, “and just as all pains are evil”
- οὐ ἀεὶ φευκτὴ “not always to be shunned”
- πεφυκυῖα one meaning is “by its nature”
- “and just as all pains are evil by their nature, so not all are always (ἀεὶ) to be shunned.”

And so we come to the end of Verse 129. Let’s recap our translation:

Because we perceived pleasure as a fundamental good and common to our nature, and so, as a result of this, we begin every choice and rejection against this, judging every good thing by the standard of how that pleasure affects us or how we react to considering experiencing that pleasure. And because pleasure is the fundamental and inborn good, this is why not every pleasure is seized and we pass by many pleasures when greater unpleasant things were to result for us as a result: and we think many pains better than pleasures whenever greater pleasure were to follow for a longer time by patiently abiding the pain.

And so we come to verse 130...

Verse 130

Bailey 130. τῇ μέντοι συμμετρήσει καὶ συμφερόντων καὶ ἀσυμφόρων βλέψει ταῦτα πάντα κρίνειν καθήκει. χρώμεθα γὰρ τῷ μὲν ἀγαθῷ κατὰ τινὰς χρόνους ὡς κακῷ, τῷ δὲ κακῷ τοῦμπαλιν ὡς ἀγαθῷ.

Καὶ τὴν αὐτάρκειαν δὲ ἀγαθὸν μέγα νομίζομεν, οὐχ ἵνα πάντως τοῖς ὀλίγοις χρώμεθα, ἀλλ' ὅπως ἐὰν μὴ ἔχωμεν τὰ πολλά, τοῖς ὀλίγοις χρώμεθα, πεπεισμένοι γνησίως ὅτι ἡδιστα πολυτελείας ἀπολαύουσιν οἱ ἥκιστα ταύτης δεόμενοι, καὶ ὅτι τὸ μὲν φυσικὸν πᾶν εὐπόριστόν ἐστι, τὸ δὲ κενὸν δυσπόριστον. οἱ τε λιτοὶ χυλοὶ ἴσην πολυτελεῖ διαίτη τὴν ἡδονὴν ἐπιφέρουσιν, ὅταν ἅπαν τὸ ἀλγοῦν κατ' ἔνδειαν ἐξαιρεθῇ.

130a. τῇ μέντοι συμμετρήσει καὶ συμφερόντων καὶ ἀσυμφόρων βλέψει ταῦτα πάντα κρίνειν καθήκει.

- συμμετρήσει "measure by comparison", literally "measure together"
 - συμ- (sym-) < σύν- (syn-) "together, with"
 - English sympathy, symbiosis
 - μετρήσει (metrēsei) "measure"
 - English meter
- συμφερόντων "that which is profitable, advantageous, expedient (for you)"
- ἀσυμφόρων "they which is inconvenient, useless, unprofitable"
- βλέπει < βλεψις "contemplation, consideration" (literally, "sight" and used here in a metaphorical sense)
- κρίνειν, form of same word from 129b.ii. κρίνοντες. Here, "to choose, decide, judge, etc."
- καθήκει "fitting, proper"
- "It is proper when judging these things to consider what is advantageous and what is not advantageous for you, in other words, what the consequences will be."

130b. χρώμεθα γὰρ τῷ μὲν ἀγαθῷ κατὰ τινὰς χρόνους ὡς κακῷ, τῷ δὲ κακῷ τοῦμπαλιν ὡς ἀγαθῷ.

Let's start at the beginning:

- χρώμεθα
 - This one takes some explaining, and it seems to be often passed over in translation. This verb is in the middle voice which means the subject of the verb is both the agent and experiencer. So, χρώμεθα generally means something like "we consult a god or oracle for ourselves" or "the declaration of an oracle or god." I think this is significant, because, in the context of Epicurean philosophy, there are no gods who are going to provide advice through a supernatural means via an oracle. So, what is going on here? The Epicurean consults their own faculty of weighing the consequences of their own choices.

- The word is also used in several more places within this verse.
- This is especially important because the next word γὰρ "because" sets up the answer to the question "Why do we 'consult the oracle' of the consequences of our actions?"

Next, we have our old friends **μὲν...δὲ....** Let's look at the similarities in those two phrases:

- [μὲν] τῷ ἀγαθῷ κατὰ τινος χρόνους ὡς κακῷ,
- [δὲ] τῷ κακῷ τᾶμπαλιν ὡς ἀγαθῷ.

So, Epicurus is contrasting τῷ ἀγαθῷ "the good (pleasure) with τῷ κακῷ "the bad" (pain). Let's look at the embedded phrases that modify the meaning here.

- κατὰ τινος χρόνους "over time"
- τᾶμπαλιν "on the other hand, on the contrary"

So, "we consult the consequences of our actions because, on the one hand, good/pleasure over time can lead to bad/pain; on the other hand, bad/pain can lead to good/pleasure."

130c. Καὶ τὴν αὐτάρκειαν δὲ ἀγαθὸν μέγα νομίζομεν,

- αὐτάρκειαν < αὐτάρκεια
 - This is another word with nuances of meaning. It is often translated as "self-reliance" or "self-sufficiency" and is often simply parsed in an economic sense. However, the Greek word is more complicated. There was a very productive thread on this topic on the EpicureanFriends.com forum <https://www.epicureanfriends.com/index.php?thread/2207-autarkia-and-epicurean-living-in-the-modern-world/&pageNo=1> and readers are encouraged to see that for additional details. To summarize, αὐτάρκεια does have one sense of being economically "self-sufficient;" however, there is also very strong thread of being psychologically "self-sufficient" in the sense of being content and self-assured, being secure and not easily swayed by others' opinions. This seems to me to be connected with the characteristic of the Epicurean sage in that "The wise one will also pay just enough attention to their reputation as to avoid being looked down upon." (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, X.120)
 - The translations can differ wildly, too:
 - Bailey: "independence of desire"
 - DeWitt & Epicurus Wiki: "self-sufficiency"
 - Yonge: "contentment"
 - Saint-Andre: "self-reliance"
 - Hicks: "independence of outward things"
 - For our purposes, we're going to leave it untranslated for now.
- νομίζομεν "We believe" Also 129g.
- "Additionally, we believe αὐτάρκεια is a great good (ἀγαθὸν μέγα)... "

130d. οὐχ ἵνα πάντως τοῖς ὀλίγοις χρώμεθα,

- ἵνα "that, so that; because; for the reason that"
- πάντως "in all ways"
- τοῖς ὀλίγοις (oligois) "a few things; a small number of things"
 - English oligarchy "rule by the few"
- χρώμεθα
 - Although we translated it as "consult" above, χρώμεθα here means something more like "to furnish the use of a thing." This is in keeping with that former sense if we remember the "oracle" sense. The oracle has provided the petitioner with something of use. Yes, it's a little convoluted; but it's all wrapped up in there. Illustrating yet again the inadequacy of relying on a single translation. If there's a way to use the same word, I'd recommend it to clearly show Epicurus's words. I'm just unsure how to do it here.
- "not so that we are furnished with the use of a few things..."

130e. ἀλλ' ὅπως ἐὰν μὴ ἔχωμεν τὰ πολλά,

- ὅπως "in order to"
- ἐὰν "if" often followed by subjunctive (as here with ἔχωμεν and ἀρκώμεθα)
- ἔχωμεν "if we were to have" (subjunctive)
- "but if we were to have many things,"

130f. τοῖς ὀλίγοις χρώμεθα,

- χρώμεθα "we would be satisfied with ourselves; we would be contented with ourselves" (subjunctive)
- "we would be contented with few things,"
 - ὀλίγοις (oligois) > English oligarchy "rule by the few"

130g. πεπεισμένοι γνησίως ὅτι ἥδιστα πολυτελείας ἀπολαύουσιν οἱ ἥκιστα ταύτης δεόμενοι,

- πεπεισμένοι "those who are convinced, persuaded"
- γνησίως "genuinely, legitimately"
- ὅτι "that"
- ἥδιστα (hēdistā) "more pleasant", related to ἡδονή (hēdonē) "pleasure"
- πολυτελείας "great expense, extravagance"
- ἀπολαύουσιν "(they) have enjoyment of"
- ἥκιστα "the least, as little as possible" (superlative of ἥκα "little")
- οἱ δεόμενοι "those in need or want (of something)"
- "those in need who are genuinely convinced of this find extravagance more pleasant,"

130h. καὶ ὅτι τὸ μὲν φυσικὸν πᾶν εὐπόριστόν ἐστι,

- εὐπόριστόν "easy to procure; providing one's subsistence with ease"
 - Also can be used to refer to ordinary food as opposed to game out of season

- I'm interpreting this τὸ φυσικὸν "the natural, Nature" refers to the natural desires discussed in verse 127, especially in light of τὸ κενὸν in the next phrase.
- "and that every natural desire is easily procured..."

130i. τὸ δὲ κενὸν δυσπόριστον.

- δυσπόριστον "hard to come by; difficult to get"
 - κενὸς is the same word Epicurus uses when talking about atoms and void. Think of that as the connotation when he talks about the "empty" desires.
- "and an empty/vain/fruitless one, difficult to get."

εὐπόριστόν and δυσπόριστον again show Epicurus's favorite writing theme of making comparisons and contrasts using very similar words.

130j. οἱ τε λιτοὶ χυλοὶ ἴσην πολυτελεῖ διαίτη τὴν ἡδονὴν ἐπιφέρουσιν,

- λιτοὶ χυλοὶ "simple/inexpensive/frugal (λιτοὶ) flavors/tastes (χυλοὶ (plural) < χυλός)"
 - χυλός is often translated as "flavor" or "taste" which is one meaning. However, another meaning of χυλός also means, according to LSJ "barley-water, gruel, having the barley or groats strained off." So, when you see "simple flavors" think of something as "simple" as barley-water" or "inexpensive thin gruel." That's the kind of flavor being referred to here.
- ἴσην (< ἴσος (isos)) "equal"
 - English isosceles (triangle) "equal sides" (isos + skalos "legs")
- πολυτελεῖ διαίτη "expensive/extravagant way of living"
- ἐπιφέρουσιν "they (i.e., simple flavors) bring"
- "because simple flavors bring equal pleasure to extravagant ways of life,"

130k. ὅταν ἅπαν τὸ ἀλγοῦν κατ' ἔνδειαν ἐξαίρεθῇ·

- ὅταν ἅπαξ "if once, when once"
 - Trivia: ἅπαξ (hapax) is used in the linguistic term *hapax legomenon* (literally "said once") which means a word which only occurs once in a specific body of work.²⁷
- ἔνδειαν "want, lack, deficiency"
- ἐξαίρεθῇ (3rd person singular subjunctive) "if (it) were to be removed/would be removed"
- "when once the pain of body and mind (τὸ ἀλγοῦν) experienced through lack or deficiency would be removed."

And that is the end of verse 130!

²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hapax_legomenon

As usual, let's recap and our consolidation of our literal translation:

130. So, all pleasure, through its nature, belongs to us as a good; however, not all are elected; and just as all pains are entirely evil by their nature, so not all are always to be shunned. It is proper when judging these things to consider what is advantageous and what is not advantageous for you; in other words, what the consequences will be. We consult the consequences of our actions; because, on the one hand, pleasure over time can lead to pain; and on the other hand, pain can lead to pleasure.

Additionally, we believe αὐτάρκεια is a great good. Not so that we are furnished with the use of a few things; but, if we were to have many things, we would be content with few things. Those in need who are genuinely convinced of this find extravagance more pleasant, and that every natural desire is easily procured, and an empty desire difficult to get. For simple flavors bring equal pleasure to extravagant ways of life when once the pain of body and mind experienced through lack or deficiency is removed.

Let's read more details now about these simple tastes which Epicurus shares in the next verse.

Verse 131

Bailey 131. καὶ μᾶζα καὶ ὕδωρ τὴν ἀκροτάτην ἀποδίδωσιν ἡδονήν, ἐπειδὴν ἐνδέων τις αὐτὰ προσενέγκηται. τὸ συνεθίζειν οὖν ἐν ταῖς ἀπλαῖς καὶ οὐ πολυτελέσι διαίταις καὶ ὑγιείας ἐστὶ συμπληρωτικὸν καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἀναγκαίας τοῦ βίου χρήσεις ἄοκνον ποιεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ τοῖς πολυτέλεσιν ἐκ διαλειμμάτων προσερχομένους κρεῖττον ἡμᾶς διατίθησι καὶ πρὸς τὴν τύχην ἀφόβους παρασκευάζει.

Ὅταν οὖν λέγωμεν ἡδονήν τέλος ὑπάρχειν, οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν, ὥς τινες ἀγνοοῦντες καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντες ἢ κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι νομίζουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μήτε ἀλγεῖν κατὰ σῶμα μήτε ταραττεσθαι κατὰ ψυχὴν·

Let's begin to break this down into digestible morsels (pun intended) since we're talking about bread and water:

131a. καὶ μᾶζα καὶ ὕδωρ τὴν ἀκροτάτην ἀποδίδωσιν ἡδονήν, ἐπειδὴν ἐνδέων τις αὐτὰ προσενέγκηται.

131a.i. καὶ μᾶζα καὶ ὕδωρ

- μᾶζα (maza) “bread”
- ὕδωρ (hydor) “water” including “spring water, rain-water, drinking water”
 - Interestingly, ὕδωρ was also the name used for the water in the water-clock used in the Athenian courts. “Stop the water!” would have been the command used to “stop the clock” when reading documents and entering evidence in a trial so as to not take time away from the speaker.
 - English hydro- as in hydro-electric, hydraulic, hydrometer
- “both bread and water” or “both bread and water together”

These are two important words: μᾶζα, ὕδωρ. A number of commentators point to these two words to insist that Epicurus and all those who lived or studied in the Garden ate *only* “bread and water.” I have always been curious about which kind of bread was being referred to. It turns out its μᾶζα (maza) which was an ancient Greek barley-cake or a thick barley porridge as opposed to ἄρτος (artos), a cake or loaf of wheat bread. Maza could be a quick, hearty, simple meal all by itself. *Pass the Flamingo* (a website on ancient recipes and food) has an interesting article on it which includes a recipe.^{28 29}

²⁸ Ancient Recipe: Maza (Ancient Greek, ca. 2nd millennium BCE)
<https://passtheflamingo.com/2017/05/24/ancient-recipe-maza-ancient-greek-ca-2nd-millennium-bce/>

²⁹ Another recipe is available at Tavola Mediterranea: Home of Culinary Archaeology on the Web:
<https://tavolamediterranea.com/2020/07/24/bread-for-the-gods-pharmakos-barley-cakes-with-cheese-and-figs/>

It's important to point back to verse 126c at this point. The idea of eating "only" bread and water seems Spartan (pun intended) and ascetic to us, but bread and water (or, probably more commonly, wine) *was* a meal in ancient Greece. A simple meal of maza with a cup of water, without all the extra dishes that made up ὄψον, would not have been an uncommon meal. Epicurus isn't advocating an ascetic lifestyle here. He's pointing to the simple, everyday meals that many Athenians took for granted. You don't need an extravagant, ten-course feast to experience pleasure. Slow down, appreciate what's in front of you, take delight in the everyday pleasures - like that meal you don't give a second thought to. But Epicurus will have more to say about this soon.

I also found it interesting - although not necessarily intentional on Epicurus's part - that the water-clock could be referred to as containing ὕδωρ. It plays into the vessel metaphors in Epicurean philosophy as well as the realization that time is precious and running out.

131a.ii. τὴν ἀκροτάτην ἀποδίδωσιν ἡδονήν (hēdonēn "pleasure"),

- ἀκροτάτην "highest, extreme, at the farthest point or end" (superlative of ἄκρος (akros))
 - English acrophobia "fear of heights"; Greek Akropolis "high city"
- ἀποδίδωσιν "(they) deliver, render, restore"
- "[a simple meal] delivers the most extreme pleasure..."

131b. ἐπειδὴν ἐνδέων τις αὐτὰ προσενέγκηται.

- ἐπειδὴν "whenever"
- ἐνδέων conveys wanting or lacking
- προσενέγκηται "take food and drink" but has the wider connotation of "bring to bear against." So, even in the food sense, you're bringing food and drink *to bear* against your hunger and thirst. The sense here is that it's more than just "eating." If Epicurus wanted to just say "eating" bread and water, he would have just said "eating."
- "... whenever food and drink have been brought to bear against hunger and thirst." Paraphrasing here!

131c. τὸ συνεθίζειν οὖν ἐν ταῖς ἀπλαῖς καὶ οὐ πολυτελέσι διαίταις καὶ ὑγείας ἐστὶ συμπληρωτικὸν

- συνεθίζειν "to become accustomed to or habituated to"
- οὖν "therefore" implying a causal relationship
- ἐν ταῖς ἀπλαῖς "simple, straightforward, plain"
- διαίταις "way or mode of living"
- ὑγείας (hygienist) "good health, soundness of body she mind"
 - English hygiene
- συμπληρωτικὸν "able to complete, forming an essential part of"

- "therefore to become accustomed to a simple and not extravagant mode of living is an essential part of the good health of the body and mind." There's nothing wrong with enjoying an extravagant feast when it becomes available, but if one makes a habit of those feasts, you'll be disappointed if one is not available. Take pleasure in the simple meal when it's before you. Take pleasure in the extravagant feast when you're invited.

131d. καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἀναγκαίαις τοῦ βίου χρήσεις ἄοκνον ποιεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον

- καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἀναγκαίαις τοῦ βίου "and for the necessities of life"
- χρήσεις "uses of a thing" (related to χρᾶω, the same word that have us χρῶμεθα in verse 130)
 - The word is the opposite of κτήσις "possession" of a thing, which I find interesting. We can't really "possess" the "necessities of life," we can only make use of them. This, to me, hints at the aphorism that "you can't take it with you."
- ἄοκνον "without hesitation, resolute, untiring"
 - α "not" + ὀκνος "shrinking, hesitation, fear, alarm"
- ποιεῖ "makes, causes, does" (3rd person singular)
- τὸν ἄνθρωπον (anthrōpon) "a person" (accusative)
 - Often simply translated "man" but it's "human" as in "mankind" so we're going with "person" here to not give any gendered misunderstanding.
 - English anthropology (human/people-study), misanthrope (hater-of-humans/people)
- "and equips a person to make use of, without fear or hesitation, the necessities of life.."

131e. καὶ τοῖς πολυτελείαις ἐκ διαλειμμάτων προσερχομένους κρεῖττον ἡμᾶς διατίθησι

- τοῖς πολυτελείαις "experiences of great expense, extravagance"
- ἐκ διαλειμμάτων "at intervals"
- προσερχομένους "to come or go; to approach, draw nigh"
- κρεῖττον - comparative of κρατυς so there it is "stronger, mightier, more powerful" but often used as a comparative of αγαθός "good," so "better" in that sense. Using both those senses of the word, we get a connotation of "stronger + better" which could be interpreted as "more intensely."
- ἡμᾶς "us" (1st person plural accusative pronoun)
- διατίθησι "to place separately, arrange each in their own places, dispose"

131f. καὶ πρὸς τὴν τύχην ἀφόβους παρασκευάζει.

- πρὸς τὴν τύχην ἀφόβους
 - ἀφόβους "fearless," literally α "no" + φόβους (phobous) "fear"
 - English phobia
- παρασκευάζει < παρασκευάζω "provide and prepare what one has not." It appears this verb refers the whole way back to the beginning of 131e and τοῖς πολυτελείαις.

Paraphrase of 131e-f: "and when extravagant experiences become available every once in awhile, they are experienced more intensely by us and we are better able to fearlessly face the vicissitudes of fortune."

Let's put 131a-f together before going on:

[a simple meal of hearty, wholesome bread and spring water] delivers the most extreme pleasure whenever food and drink have been brought to bear against hunger and thirst; and, when extravagant experiences do come up every once in a while, they are experienced more intensely by us and we are better able to fearlessly face the vicissitudes of fortune."

To emphasize again, Epicurus is not advocating asceticism in these passages. We do not shun extravagant, lavish, or expensive experiences. First, he calls us to learn to really take pleasure in a simple, everyday meal. Meditate on the fact that if you're really hungry, some maza brought to bear against your hunger can truly be the height of pleasure. As Cicero writes, "Socratem audio dicentem, cibi condimentum esse famem, potionis sitim." ("I hear Socrates saying that the best seasoning for food is hunger; for drink, thirst." Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, II. 28) Additionally, if we truly become accustomed to this thought - that it really becomes ingrained - we'll enjoy everything more and be less concerned about the ups and downs of Fortune and chance. Epicurus also reminds us that a simple diet can be an important contributor to the health of the body and mind. That sounds like modern advice. However, there's nothing "wrong" in indulging once in a while. If the chance to attend a lavish banquet arises, we can go and enjoy ourselves intensely. If we have to eat bread and water for a time, we take pleasure in it since it assuages our hunger and thirst, and we can take pleasure in just living. If we are able to take equal pleasure in both the simple meal and the sumptuous feast, the ups and downs of τύχης "chance or fortune" will have no power over us. In light of this interpretation, my contention would be that this section is a concrete example of **Principal Doctrine 16**:

Βραχέα σοφῶς τύχη παρεμπίπτει, τὰ δὲ μέγιστα καὶ κυριώτατα ὁ λογισμὸς διώκηκε καὶ κατὰ τὸν συνεχῆ χρόνον τοῦ βίου διοικεῖ καὶ διοικῆσει.

"Only a little does chance creep into the sage's life; but reasoning, reflection, and wisdom put into order the greatest and most important things continuously throughout the time of one's life in the past, the present, and the future."

So many times, translators put the emphasis on the "bread and water" in this section. I think Epicurus is simply using a very concrete, down-to-earth example of how to shift your perspective so as to take the sting out of the ups and downs of life.

Time to go on to a passage that expands on this theme.

131g. Ὅταν οὖν λέγωμεν ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν,

- [οὖν] Ὅταν λέγωμεν "Therefore, whenever we say..."
- ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν, "the fact is that pleasure is the τέλος..."
 - We encountered ὑπάρχειν back in verse 125 with the meaning of "the fact is..."
 - I highly recommend going back to the end of commentary on verse 128 for a look at the implications and nuance of τέλος.
- "Therefore, whenever we say that pleasure is the τέλος..."

Warning! We're heading into the grammar weeds for a little while. Stay close!

There are two different verbs in 131g and 131h (our next line): λέγωμεν and λέγομεν

- λέγωμεν (subjunctive)
- λέγομεν (indicative)
 - Both are conjugations of λέγω. Λέγω originally meant "lay down" but came to mean "lay down an argument" or simply "say" or "speak."

The subjunctive mood has several uses. I believe what's going on here is the subjunctive with λέγωμεν in the indefinite clause is an exhortation "referring to repeated actions in indefinite present time." So what Epicurus is saying is that "we repeatedly *say* 'pleasure is the τέλος' all the time" when he uses λέγωμεν. Yes, you can say all that with one word in Greek.³⁰

The negative indicative οὐ λέγομεν in 131h, on the other hand, is a statement of fact: "we do not say." Period. There's no equivocation, no wiggle room. It's a statement of fact. "We say repeatedly all the time 'pleasure is the τέλος.' We do not say..."

Let's move on to see what we do not say.

131h. οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν,

- οὐ ...λέγομεν, "we don't say ..."
- τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς "the pleasure of those who are ἀσώτων"
 - ἀσώτων (genitive of ἄσωτος (asōtos)
 - LSJ defines ἄσωτος as "having no hope of safety, in desperate case; abandoned; spendthrift, profligate." The Latin synonym given is *perditus* "squander, dissipate, waste, throw away, lost"

³⁰ For more on the subjunctive, check out the following sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subjunctive_%28Ancient_Greek%29?wprov=sfla1

https://daedalus.umkc.edu/FirstGreekBook/JWW_FGB32.html

<https://ancientgreek.pressbooks.com/chapter/46/>

<https://www.billmounce.com/monday-with-mounce/my-second-thoughts-about-subjunctives-purpose-clauses>

A quick diversion on ἄσωτος is in order. For those readers with a background in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the parable of the Prodigal Son uses this exact word to describe the lifestyle chosen by the wayward son: *And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.* (Luke 15:13, KJV) Here ἄσωτος is translated as "riotous living." The word also occurs in one other place, this time in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures (known to Christians as the "Old" Testament) to describe a sex worker, calling her ἀνεπτρωμένη "inciting" and ἄσωτος "carnal." (Proverbs 7:11) The original connotation of "having no hope" or "lost" gives an extra dimension to the word. The word literally is formed from ἀ- ("not") + σώζω (sōizō "save"): "not saved, lost, desperate." That sense, along with the "extravagant, prodigal, profligate," gives me a much richer sense of what Epicurus's point was.

It needs to also be pointed out that, unlike those Biblical references, there's no moral judgment being passed here. All pleasure is good. It's a question of the consequences. We'll discuss this after we examine how Epicurus describes the pleasure of those who are described as ἄσωτος.

131i. ὥς τινες ἀγνοοῦντες καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντες ἢ κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι νομίζουσιν,

- ὥς "as, like" (introducing a simile as to the pleasures of the ἄσωτος are like...)
- τινες ἀγνοοῦντες "not knowing something, being ignorant of something; going wrong, making a false step"
- ὁμολογοῦντες "agreeing with, saying the same thing as"
- κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι "take or understand in a bad or evil sense"
- νομίζουσιν "(they) believe"
- "like those who are ignorant or those who don't agree with us or those who believe wrongly."
 - This seems to me to be a shot directly at the Platonists, Cyrenaics, Peripatetics, and others who tried to slander and mischaracterize the students of the Garden.

131j. ἀλλὰ τὸ μῆτε ἀλγεῖν κατὰ σῶμα μῆτε ταραττεσθαι κατὰ ψυχὴν·

- σῶμα "one's body; one's material life in the physical world"
- ταραττεσθαι < τάρᾱττω, Attic form of ταρασσω (tarassō) "trouble, disturb, upset"
 - ταραττεσθαι (Attic form) < ταραττεσθαι (middle/passive infinitive)
 - This word is connected to ἀταραξία (ataraxia) < ἀ- (a- "not") + ταρασσω (tarássō "trouble, disturb") + -ῖα
- "but that which neither pains the body (σῶμα sōma) nor troubles the mind (ψυχὴν psykhēn)."

Look at that! We're at the end of another verse! We're covered a lot of ground, so it's time to pull it all together.

A simple meal of hearty, wholesome bread and spring water delivers the most extreme pleasure whenever food and drink have been brought to bear against hunger and thirst; and, when extravagant experiences do come up every once in a while, they are experienced more intensely by us, and we are better able to fearlessly face the vicissitudes of fortune.

Therefore, whenever we say repeatedly that "pleasure is the τέλος," we do not say the pleasure of those who are prodigal like those who are ignorant, those who don't agree with us, or those who believe wrongly; but we mean that which neither pains the body nor troubles the mind.

Now, on to verse 132 where we find a description of the life of one who, in Epicurus's words, can be described as άσωτος.

Verse 132

Bailey 132. οὐ γὰρ πότοι καὶ κῶμοι συνείροντες οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, ὅσα φέρει πολυτελὲς τράπεζα, τὸν ἡδὺν γεννᾷ βίον, ἀλλὰ νήφων λογισμὸς καὶ τὰς αἰτίας ἐξερευνῶν πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ τὰς δόξας ἐξελαύνων ἐξ ὧν πλεῖστος τὰς ψυχὰς καταλαμβάνει θόρυβος.

Τούτων δὲ πάντων ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν φρόνησις. διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφίας τιμιώτερον ὑπάρχει φρόνησις, ἐξ ἧς αἱ λοιπαὶ πᾶσαι πεφύκασιν ἀρεταί, διδάσκουσα ὥς οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ζῆν ἄνευ τοῦ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως <οὐδὲ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως> ἄνευ τοῦ ἡδέως. συμπεφύκασι γὰρ αἱ ἀρεταὶ τῷ ζῆν ἡδέως, καὶ τὸ ζῆν ἡδέως τούτων ἐστὶν ἀχώριστον.

132a. οὐ γὰρ πότοι καὶ κῶμοι συνείροντες οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων,

There are a lot of καί's "and" and οὐδέ's "not this/that" here, so we'll need to break this down.

132a.i. οὐ [γὰρ] πότοι καὶ κῶμοι συνείροντες

- πότοι is plural of πότος "drinking-bout, carousal" (from πίνω "I drink")
 - I find it interesting that Epicurus uses the word πότος (potos) and not συμπόσιον (symposion) "symposium, drinking-party." He wrote a book or dialogue entitled Symposium in which he wrote "Even when drunk, the wise one will not talk nonsense or act silly." So, Epicurus didn't seem to oppose drinking wine or attending drinking-parties. There seems to be a distinction between πότος and συμπόσιον, possibly with the difference being one of emphasis on drinking versus conviviality.
 - English potable "drinkable" comes from πότος
- κῶμοι (kōmoi) plural of κῶμος "a village festival: a revel, carousal, merry-making, Latin: comissatio." They seem to have involved crowned revelers parading the streets, bearing torches, singing, dancing, and "playing frolics."³¹
- οὐ συνείροντες (ou syneirontes) "not stringing together"
- "not an endless string of drinking parties and festivals..."
- Note that he doesn't say you can't attend drinking parties or take part in village festivals! He's saying life shouldn't be an "endless string" of them. That's going to lead to more pain than pleasure in the end.

132a.ii. οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν

- οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις is usually translated as "nor the act of enjoying, nor the taking pleasure in..."

³¹ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0058:entry=kw=mos>

- However, there appears to be more nuance here. LSJ also defines the word with "in bad sense (freq. ironically), have the benefit of; take advantage of; make sport of." We'll examine the potential significance of this shortly.
- παίδων (paidōn) is an ambiguous word with a number of possible meanings here. See the discussion directly below.
- γυναικῶν (gynaikōn) "of women" Also refers to "wives" but "women" seems to make more sense in this context, although it's a good idea to keep both those meanings in mind.

παίδων has multiple meanings:

1. child, son (in relation to family)
2. child, boy, girl (in relation to age)
3. slave (in relation to one's condition in life)

In the context of the Letter, any of these could possibly make sense although 2 and 3 would work best. It depends how we are going to interpret ἀπολαύσεις.

ἀπολαύσεις

In translations of the Letter I have seen, οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις is always given a straightforward sexual meaning:

- "not sexual love" (Hicks)
- "sexual enjoyment" (Epicurus Wiki)
- "enjoying [boys and women]" (Saint-Andre)
- "enjoyment (of female society)" (Yonge)
- "sexual pleasures (with boys and women)" (DeWitt)
- "satisfaction of lusts" (Bailey)

ἀπολαύσεις, according to LSJ,³² doesn't have this sexual connotation by itself. I'll admit that it could be here within the context of this passage. My contention is that Epicurus is getting at a deeper, more nuanced point. ἀπολαύω does have to do with enjoying something (or someone, in this case), but it seems to also include a sense of taking advantage or taking benefit from something (or someone). I can't necessarily vouch for the authority of a website by Georgios Babiniotis,³³ but the etymology he gives of the word implies something taken as booty.

Translated into English, Babiniotis states "it is a delight that comes from an acquisition that has been preceded by conflict, an exercise of violence that offers the joy of fruition and power." So that idea of taking enjoyment in something you feel entitled to or that you can take advantage of with impunity underlies the word Epicurus decided to use. It's not *just* a sexual meaning. So, in light of all that, I would advocate translating that phrase as "not taking advantage of slaves (or boys) and women," Admittedly, it's most often likely advantage for sex, but the translation for which I'm advocating expands that sense. For me, this fits into the egalitarian ethos of the

³²

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Da%3Apolau%2Fw>

³³ https://e-didaskalia.blogspot.com/2016/08/blog-post_113.html?m=1

Garden in which slaves and women took active roles in the life of the school. People who took advantage of these members of society - who were most often seen by ancient Greek society as the lowest, least important members - would be going against the equality of opportunity that the Garden professed. From my perspective, this also seems to fit with the characteristic of the sage shared by Diogenes Laertius: γυναικί τ' οὐ μίγησεσθαι τὸν σοφὸν ἢ οἱ νόμοι ἀπαγορεύουσιν "The wise one will not establish a sexual relationship in a way that is against the law or forbidden by custom."³⁴ Now, I know ancient "law or custom" is a wide spectrum, but I'm using that as the translation for νόμοι.³⁵ In the end, my perspective is that ἀπολαύσεις - yet again - demonstrates the inadequacy of relying on a single translator or translation and not digging into the original Greek.

132a.iii. οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων,

Remember, this entire phrase is:

οὐ γὰρ πότοι καὶ κῶμοι συνείροντες οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων,...

ἰχθύων (ikhthyōn) is, justifiably, always translated as "of fishes." That's its literal meaning. English gets ichthyology "the study of fish" from this word. And translators lean into some supposed prohibition against eating fish as some kind of extravagant dish.

I'd like to offer an alternative.

If I look at the entire phrase here:

οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων,

And I take οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις to mean "not to take advantage of"... who do we not take advantage of? To me it looks like we have four words in the genitive plural in a row:

παίδων

γυναικῶν

ἰχθύων

ἄλλων "of others"

Translators using ἀπολαύσεις in a purely sexual connotation have to translate it as "enjoyment" then when bringing up the fish because... Well, no sex with fish? That doesn't make sense, so we twist the original? Interestingly, LSJ has a mention of a metaphorical use of ἰχθῦς "a stupid fellow"³⁶

Granted, the only citation is to Plutarch's *De sollertia animalium*:

³⁴ <https://sites.google.com/view/epicureansage>

³⁵ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=no%2Fmos2>

³⁶ [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=i\)xqu=s](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=i)xqu=s)

*But they who deride men as insipid and void of ingenuity call them by the names of fish. And whereas we can produce millions of things and accidents which are foretold us by land and flying creatures, there is not any one such example that the patrons of water-animals can produce in their behalf; but being all void of hearing, perfectly sottish, and without any sight, discerning, or providence, they are all thrown apart into that same place, unblest and hideous, called the sea, as it were into the region of the ungodly, where the rational and intellectual part of the soul is extinguished; being animated with only some diminutive portion, the lowest that may be imagined, of a confused and overwhelmed sense, so that they rather seem to palpitate than breathe.*³⁷

This excerpt seems to be more than simply LSJ's "stupid fellow." Plutarch writes that the common metaphor is made between "men [who are] insipid and void of ingenuity" and fish and goes on to include traits like "void of hearing, perfectly sottish, and without any sight, discerning, or providence." Are we to take these traits as belonging to people who are named "fish"? It seems that way to me. People who are in this condition are vulnerable in society, just like slaves and women. Could Epicurus be saying, "Don't take advantage of the 'fish'"? That's my initial contention. It follows along with the rest of the phrase and doesn't involve any tortured manipulation. Food for thought (pun intended).

****But...**

Let's look at a manuscript and see how those lines are divided up. If the fish go with the next phrase, we could have an even more complicated situation.

Looking at Oxford's Arundel MS 531 (folio 174.verso, from the end of line 16), we find the following division and punctuation:³⁸

· ουδαπολυ|σεις παιδων και γυναικ · ουδιχθων και των αλλων 'οσα | φερει πολυτελης τραπεζα
τον 'ηδιν γεννα βιον · αλλα | νηφων λογισμος ·

So, the phrases in this manuscript from 1450-1500 breaks those phrases into:

- οὐδ' ἀπολεύσεις παιδων καὶ γυναικῶν
- οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα φέρει πολυτελὴς τράπεζα τὸν ἡδὺν γεννᾶ βίον
- ἀλλὰ νήφων λογισμὸς

I'm not sure how much authority to give a manuscript written 15+ centuries after Epicurus as to punctuation, but *if* that's the case, we should backtrack and parse again. Allow me to bring you along on my thought process here:

³⁷ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0370%3Asection%3D22>

³⁸ http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=arundel_ms_531_fs001r

132a/b. οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, ὅσα φέρει πολυτελὴς τράπεζα, τὸν ἡδὺν γεννᾷ βίον, ἀλλὰ νήφων λογισμὸς

- οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων "and not fishes and others"
- ὅσα "inasmuch as, in so far as"
- φέρει (3rd person singular) "bears, carries, brings"
- πολυτελὴς τράπεζα "an extravagant table, i.e., dinner table, and, by extension, a meal"
 - "an extravagant table carries..."
- τὸν ἡδὺν γεννᾷ βίον "begets a sweet life"
- ἀλλὰ "... but..."
- νήφων λογισμὸς "sober, self-controlled reasoning"

So, the latter phrase can be translated: ", and not fish and other things, an extravagant table brings a sweet life but sober reasoning." The "brings" seems to be in need of a negation in there: an extravagant table does [not] bring a sweet life but sober reasoning [does]? Is the οὐδ' before ἰχθύων supposed to serve that function? That doesn't seem plausible, especially given the οὐδ''s from earlier in that phrase. It seems to me they should be part of the same thought: **οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων**. However, the first οὐδ' goes with ἀπολαύσεις. Does the second go with the next verb φέρει: οὐδέ φέρει? Something like "and, in so far as, an extravagant meal of fish and other things does not bring a sweet life BUT sober reasoning"?

Ah, is that another option? Rearranging the Greek into a more "English order":

οὐδ' ὅσα πολυτελὴς τράπεζα ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀλλὰ νήφων λογισμὸς φέρει τὸν ἡδὺν γεννᾷ βίον

"and nor does an extravagant table of fish and other things bring forth a sweet life but self-controlled reasoning."

There's no prohibition on eating fish or other things here. Epicurus is simply using a counterexample of the simple meal of maza and water to drive his point home: You don't need an extravagant meal for a sweet life. You can certainly take pleasure in an elaborate feast, but it's not necessary. When hungry, a simple meal can bring as much pleasure as the feast if enjoyed with friendly conversation and gratitude for life.

So, that's one last option there, and maybe - maybe - the most appropriate. I stand by my digression on ἀπολαύσεις; however, I'm open to feedback on the "fish" and whether we're talking about food or people. I think it's worth considering, but, as I've mentioned I'm still learning. If you're reading this, I appreciate your sticking around for the ride.

132c. καὶ τὰς αἰτίας ἐξερευνῶν πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς

- τὰς αἰτίας "the causes"

- ἐξερευνῶν "searching out, examining"
- πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς "every choice and rejection" (we've seen these words a number of times now!)
- "and examining the cause of every choice and rejection"

132d. καὶ τὰς δόξας ἐξελαύνων ἐξ ὧν πλεῖστος τὰς ψυχὰς καταλαμβάνει θόρυβος.

- τὰς δόξας "the notions, opinions"
- ἐξελαύνων "driving out, expelling"
- ἐξ ὧν πλεῖστος τὰς ψυχὰς "the greatest number from the mind"
- καταλαμβάνει "overtake, seize, lay hold of"
- θόρυβος literally "noise, esp. the confused noise of a crowded assembly, uproar" so "confusion of the mind" and similar senses
- "and driving out the greatest number of opinions that take hold off the mind and bring confusion and trouble."

132e. Τούτων δὲ πάντων ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν φρόνησις.

- "and so the foundation (ἀρχή) of all these and the greatest good (τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν) is φρόνησις."

So, what is φρόνησις?

φρόνησις (phronēsis) is defined in LSJ as "practical wisdom." In the immediate context of the Letter, we can refer back to that trait or faculty that expels opinions that bring confusion and trouble the mind. In fact, it's the "foundation" and "greatest good" for accomplishing this. It allows us to make choices and rejections that will lead to pleasure. The idea of practical wisdom, wisdom put to practical ends, is consistent with Epicurus's ideas that philosophy should be practical in moving one toward a more pleasurable life and that one is responsible for one's own choices and rejections.

In Principal Doctrine 5, Epicurus also cites "practical wisdom" as one of the three traits of a pleasurable life: *Οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ζῆν ἄνευ τοῦ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως <οὐδὲ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως> ἄνευ τοῦ ἡδέως· ὅτω δ' ἔν τούτων μὴ ὑπάρχει οἷον ζῆν φρονίμως, καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως ὑπάρχει, οὐκ ἔστι τοῦτον ἡδέως ζῆν.*

*It is not possible to live a pleasurable life without the traits of **practical wisdom**, morality, and justice; and it is impossible to live with **practical wisdom**, morality, and justice without living pleasurably. When one of these is lacking, it is impossible to live a pleasurable life.*

132f. διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφίας τιμιώτερον ὑπάρχει φρόνησις,

- φιλοσοφίας (philosophias)

- τιμιώτερον "of high price, held in honor, worthy"
- ὑπάρχει
- "and, on this account, practical wisdom is prized more dearly than philosophy"

132g. ἐξ ἧς αἱ λοιπαὶ πᾶσαι πεφύκασιν ἀρεταί,

- "and from it springs forth all the remaining "virtues" (ἀρεταί)"

A quick note on ἀρεταί (singular, ἀρετή (aretē)). When someone says the word "virtue," many people go down the road of "Virtue is its own reward" and so on. The ancient Greek meaning was originally something like excellence or brave deeds or meritorious actions. Those deeds which displayed "excellence" of character. The idea of the moral virtues grew out of this meaning.

132h. διδάσκουσα ὥς οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ζῆν ἄνευ τοῦ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως

This is a restatement of Principal Doctrine 5 using the same words:

- φρονίμως
- καλῶς
- δικαίως

"teaching us that a pleasurable life does not exist without the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice,"

132i. <οὐδὲ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως> ἄνευ τοῦ ἡδέως.

"nor do the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice without pleasure:"

132j. συμπεφύκασι γὰρ αἱ ἀρεταὶ τῷ ζῆν ἡδέως,

- συμπεφύκασι "grow together united"
- "because the virtues grow together with a pleasurable life."

132k. καὶ τὸ ζῆν ἡδέως τούτων ἐστὶν ἀχώριστον.

- ἀχώριστον "inseparable"
- "and the pleasurable life is inseparable from these."

Now, our literal translation of verse 132:

For it is not an endless string of drinking parties and festivals, and not taking advantage of slaves and women, nor does an extravagant table of fish and other things bring forth a sweet life but self-controlled reasoning and examining the cause of every choice and rejection and driving out the greatest number of opinions that take hold of the mind and bring confusion and trouble.

And so the foundation of all these and the greatest good is φρόνησις, practical wisdom. On this account, practical wisdom is prized more dearly than philosophy itself, and from practical

wisdom springs forth all the remaining virtues, teaching us that a pleasurable life does not exist without the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice; nor do the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice without pleasure: because the virtues grow together with a pleasurable life and the pleasurable life is inseparable from these.

And that ends verse 132. On to the next one!

Verse 133

Bailey 133: ἐπεὶ τίνα νομίζεις εἶναι κρείττονα τοῦ καὶ περὶ θεῶν ὅσια δοξάζοντος καὶ περὶ θανάτου διὰ παντὸς ἀφόβως ἔχοντος καὶ τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἐπιλελογισμένου τέλος, καὶ τὸ μὲν τῶν ἀγαθῶν πέρας ὡς ἔστιν εὐσυμπλήρωτόν τε καὶ εὐπόριστον διαλαμβάνοντος, τὸ δὲ τῶν κακῶν ὡς ἢ χρόνους ἢ πόρους ἔχει βραχεῖς, τὴν δὲ ὑπὸ τινων δεσπότην εἰσαγομένην πάντων ἐγγελώντος <εἰμαρμένην; * * * * ὧν ἃ μὲν κατ' ἀνάγκην γίνεται>, ἃ δὲ ἀπὸ τύχης, ἃ δὲ παρ' ἡμᾶς διὰ τὸ τὴν μὲν ἀνάγκην ἀνυπεύθυνον εἶναι, τὴν δὲ τύχην ἄστατον ὁρᾶν, τὸ δὲ παρ' ἡμᾶς ἀδέσποτον, ὃ καὶ τὸ μεμπτὸν καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον παρακολουθεῖν πέφυκεν.

133a. ἐπεὶ τίνα νομίζεις εἶναι κρείττονα τοῦ

- κρείττονα
 - If comparative of κρατυς: "more powerful"
 - If comparative of αγαθός: "better"
 - Both senses could be at work here; however, LSJ also gives definition of "having control over, master of, esp. of desires and passions." I think this may actually be a component in the intent, too.
- "Seeing that, whom do you consider (νομίζεις) is better or more powerful than..."

133b. καὶ περὶ θεῶν ὅσια δοξάζοντος

- ὅσια "pious, devout"
 - LSJ: "The sense of ὅσιος often depends on its relation on the one hand to δίκαιος (sanctioned by human law), on the other to ἱερός (sacred to the gods)" In this context, it appears to be the opposite of δίκαιος, hence "pious, devout" beliefs.
- "one who holds pious beliefs concerning the gods (θεῶν (theōn))..."

133c. καὶ περὶ θανάτου διὰ παντὸς ἀφόβως ἔχοντος

- "and one who has absolutely no fears (ἀφόβως (a + phobōs)) concerning death (θανάτου (thanatou))..."

133d. καὶ τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἐπιλελογισμένου τέλος,

- ἐπιλελογισμένου (epilelogismenou) has the literal sense of applying one's reason (logismos) onto (epi-) a problem to be solved.
 - Epicurus's choice of this word demonstrates his respect for one's faculty of reason (logismos) as long as that reason is in service to living pleasurably.
- τῆς φύσεως "of nature" but φύσεως has the sense of capital-N Nature, one's own nature (personality, temperament), and what is natural. All of those seem operative here. I've tried to thread the needle with "of one's natural state."
- "and one who has *rationaly determined* (ἐπιλελογισμένου) the τέλος of one's natural state."

133e. καὶ τὸ **μὲν** τῶν ἀγαθῶν πέρας ὥς ἔστιν εὐσυμπλήρωτόν τε καὶ εὐπόριστον διαλαμβάνοντος,

- τῶν ἀγαθῶν πέρας "the limits/boundaries of good things (i.e., pleasure)"
- εὐσυμπλήρωτόν τε καὶ εὐπόριστον "**both** easily attained **and** easily secured" that is "providing one's subsistence with ease"
 - LSJ also gives εὐπόριστον the sense of "ordinary food, opp. game out of season" which makes sense in the context here. If you're hunting for game out of its regular season, you're going to experience many more difficulties than if you go with the seasonal game or foods.
- διαλαμβάνοντος "one who determines, grasps (in thought), apprehends"
- "and the one who grasps that, on the one hand, good things are both easily attained and easily secured..."

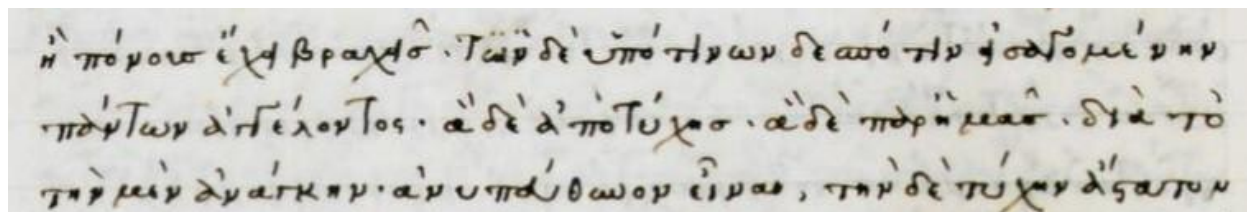
133f. τὸ **δὲ** τῶν κακῶν ὥς ἢ χρόνους ἢ πόνους ἔχει βραχεῖς,

- ἢ χρόνους ἢ πόνους "either time or pain"
- βραχεῖς "short" as in a small quantity
- "and, on the other hand, that evil things (τῶν κακῶν (kakōn)) are either short in time or brief in pain..."

133g. τὴν δὲ ὑπὸ τινῶν δεσπότιν εἰσαγομένην πάντων ἐγγελῶντος <εἰμαρμένην; * * * * ὧν ἃ μὲν κατ' ἀνάγκην γίνεται>,

- δεσπότιν <δέσποινα "mistress, lady of the household; queen"
 - This is the feminine counterpart of δεσπότης (despotēs) "master of the house" especially in connection to owning enslaved people
 - The feminine δεσπότιν is used because Fate Τύχη is grammatically feminine and so depicted as a female goddess.
- εἰσαγομένην <εἰσάγω "leading in, introducing (onto the stage)"
- ἐγγελῶντος "laugh at, mock"
- "one who laughs at those who introduce Fate onto the stage as mistress of all things?"

The <bracketed section> was curious to me. Is that an addition? In the original text? I decided to first take a look at the digitized manuscripts, specifically BML Plut. 69.35 from the 12th century CE. In fact, that bracketed section is not in the manuscript:



The manuscript goes from (2nd line) πάντων (what looks like) ἀγγελοντος· directly to ἃ δὲ ἀπὸ τύχης. In further investigation, Bailey (*Epicurus: The Extant Remains* (1926), p. 340) discusses a

lacuna “of some considerable extent” in the manuscripts with various readings including the generally “agreed on” εἰμαρμένην following on. So, this manuscript simply left the lacuna out. We are obviously missing some material. Is it better to leave out illegible or hard-to-read material? To try to reconstruct? What does it mean in this context to “read Epicurus's words”?

- “εἰμαρμένην;” means “decreed, destined, allotted (by fate)” with the Greek interrogative mark (; = Greek ?) which fits the context.
- Then, after a lacuna, Bailey provides ἃ μὲν κατ’ ἀνάγκην γίνεται to contrast with the following phrases beginning with ἃ δὲ.

I would offer that we have to rely on scholars to examine, compare, and reconstruct the text from the extant manuscripts. We have to accept that we do not have autographs from the very hand of Epicurus. We have copies of copies of copies of copies stretching over several hundred years: Some done by those fluent in Greek; some by those less skilled. This isn't too say we are in a hopeless situation. The same can be said for most ancient texts, maybe with the exception of Babylonian texts which were inscribed into clay by their authors then preserved by fire or the inscriptions on Egyptian stone monuments. Papyrus, parchment, and paper are much more fragile materials. Plus, with many manuscripts available online now in digital repositories, we can at least follow the trail taken by scholars to see how close they adhere to or how far they stray from what is written in the manuscripts. We can lean on their scholarship but not necessarily blindly follow them.

133h. ὧν ἃ μὲν κατ’ ἀνάγκην γίνεται, ἃ δὲ ἀπὸ τύχης, ἃ δὲ παρ’ ἡμᾶς διὰ τὸ τὴν μὲν ἀνάγκην ἀνυπεύθυνον εἶναι, τὴν δὲ τύχην ἄστατον ὁρᾶν, τὸ δὲ παρ’ ἡμᾶς ἀδέσποτον,

- Note the two phrases with μὲν...δὲ...δὲ yet again showing Epicurus's penchant for lists and mirroring ideas.
- ἀνυπεύθυνον “of things, beyond human control or criticism”
 - See also Philodemus P.Herc. 1251.3.10³⁹
 - “some things come about for us by necessity, some by fate/chance; some come about by necessity and are beyond our control
- ἄστατον (a-staton) “unsteady, unstable; uncertain” so, by extension, not able to be trusted
 - This is related to “static” in the sense of stable, immovable. Fortune is “a-static” to coin a term.
- ὁρᾶν “one who sees”
- ἀδέσποτον “without a master”

ἀδέσποτον literally means “no ruler” from ἀ a + δέσποτον (despoton) which gives rise to the English despot. LSJ gives the sense of master, lord, owner, and gives the comment, as mentioned above, that this often referred to the owner of enslaved people. Epicurus is telling us, by using ἀδέσποτον, that we are not a “slave” to fate. There is no master beyond ourselves. This, of course, also echoes the “mistress” from the previous phrases. We have no mistress nor master beyond ourselves.

³⁹ <https://papyri.info/dclp/62463>

- "one who sees that fortune is untrustworthy/unsteady , and that we have no master beyond ourselves"

133j. **ὅ καὶ τὸ μεμπτὸν καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον παρακολουθεῖν πέφυκεν.**

- καὶ τὸ μεμπτὸν καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον
 - μεμπτὸν "to be blamed; blameworthy"
 - ἐναντίον "opposite, contrary"
 - This phrase is normally translated as some permutation of “both blame and praise.” However, the word "praise/praiseworthy" is not in the Greek but implied by the juxtaposition of καὶ τὸ μεμπτὸν καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον which literally means "that which is blameworthy and that which is its **opposite**."
- παρακολουθεῖν "following beside, following closely, c. dat., Dem.: of a physician, π. νοσήματι Plat.; so, π. τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς Dem.: of an audience, to follow with the mind, Aeschin."
- πέφυκεν "brought forth, produced"

Which brings us to the end of verse 133 and our consolidated literal translation:

Seeing that, whom do you consider is better or more powerful than one who holds pious beliefs concerning the gods; one who has absolutely no fears concerning death; one who has rationally determined the τέλος of one's natural state; and the one who grasps that, on the one hand, good things (namely pleasures) are both easily attained and easily secured, and, on the other hand, evil things (or pains) are either short in time or brief in suffering; someone who laughs at Fate which is introduced onto the stage of life by many as the mistress of all things? For that person, even though some things happen by necessity, some by chance, and some by our own power, for although necessity is beyond our control, they see that chance is unstable and there is no other master beyond themselves, so that praise and its opposite are inseparably connected to themselves.

Verse 134

Bailey: 134. (ἔπει κρείττον ἦν τῷ περὶ θεῶν μύθῳ κατακολουθεῖν ἢ τῇ τῶν φυσικῶν εἰμαρμένη δουλεύειν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐλπίδα παραιτήσεως ὑπογράφει θεῶν διὰ τιμῆς, ἡ δὲ ἀπαραίτητον ἔχει τὴν ἀνάγκην)· τὴν δὲ τύχην οὔτε θεόν, ὥς οἱ πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν, ὑπολαμβάνοντος (οὐθὲν γὰρ ἀτάκτως θεῷ πράττεται) οὔτε <πάντων> ἀβέβαιον αἰτίαν (<οὐκ> οἶεται μὲν γὰρ ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακὸν ἐκ ταύτης πρὸς τὸ μακαρίως ζῆν ἀνθρώποις δίδοσθαι, ἀρχὰς μέντοι μεγάλων ἀγαθῶν ἢ κακῶν ὑπὸ ταύτης χορηγεῖσθαι),

134a. (ἔπει κρείττον ἦν τῷ περὶ θεῶν μύθῳ κατακολουθεῖν ἢ τῇ τῶν φυσικῶν εἰμαρμένη δουλεύειν·

- ἐπει "since" (the cause of something)
- This is the second of three times that Epicurus uses κρείττον "better, stronger, more powerful" in 131, here, and in 135.
- τῷ περὶ θεῶν μύθῳ (mythō < mythos) "the fictional story or legend about the gods"
 - I would contend Epicurus is using the singular μύθῳ "myth, legend" here to refer back to the incorrect opinion that the hoi polloi hold about the gods, here literally calling it a "fictional story."
- κατακολουθεῖν "follow after, obey"
- φυσικῶν "of the inquirers into nature, natural philosophers esp. of the Ionic and other pre-Socratic philosophers"
 - τῇ τῶν φυσικῶν εἰμαρμένη "the decrees of the old natural philosophers" i.e., determinists, those decreeing fate is all-powerful
- δουλεύειν "to be enslaved", related to δούλος "slave" (Note: keeping up the metaphor started with the mistress/master idioms in the previous verse)
 - "Since it is better to follow the fictional story of the gods than to be enslaved by the deterministic decrees of the old natural philosophers."

134b. ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐλπίδα παραιτήσεως ὑπογράφει θεῶν διὰ τιμῆς, ἡ δὲ ἀπαραίτητον ἔχει τὴν ἀνάγκην)·

- "Because, on the one hand, ..."
- ἐλπίδα "hope, expectation" (accusative)
- παραιτήσεως "supplication, entreaty, intercession"
- ὑπογράφει is also in 123 (in the aorist):
 - ὑπογράφει "outline, trace"
 - Epicurus is using the image of outlining or tracing an image to be filled in by another. Consider this like the image of letters indicated by a teacher by an outline or tracing for the student to then follow. In 123, it is the idea that the gods are imperishable and blessed is, basically, how the gods are commonly understood to

be -- that is the "general indication" of the nature of the gods. Here, I'd suggest something like the sense of "generally indicates" or "generally supposes."

- διὰ τιμῆς "by means of worship, offerings, honoring (of the gods)"
- "Because, on the one hand, one can generally suppose the intercession of the gods by means of worship..."
- ἀπαράιτητον "not to be moved by prayer"
 - "on the other hand, necessity (ἀνάγκη) is not moved by prayer."

134c. τὴν δὲ τύχην οὐτε θεόν, ὥς οἱ πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν, ὑπολαμβάνοντος

- "such a one accepts that Fate is not a god, as the hoi polloi understand,..."

134d. (οὐθὲν γὰρ ἀτάκτως θεῷ πράττεται)

- "(for a god does nothing in a disorderly or haphazardly manner)"
 - ἀτάκτως < ἀ "not" + τάκτως (taktōs)
 - τάκτως "ordered, prescribed" from which English gets tactics, tactical

134e. οὐτε <πάντων> ἀβέβαιον αἰτίαν (<οὐκ> οἶται μὲν γὰρ ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακὸν ἐκ ταύτης πρὸς τὸ μακαρίως εἶναι ἀνθρώποις δίδοσθαι, ἀρχὰς μὲντοι μεγάλων ἀγαθῶν ἢ κακῶν ὑπὸ ταύτης χορηγεῖσθαι),

- Ἀβέβαιον αἰτίαν "unreliable/ unsteady/ uncertain cause (also has connotation of blame, guilt)"
 - "And it [chance] is not the uncertain cause of everything, for one does not think it can grant good or evil for a person's blessed life," (after Bailey)
- μὲντοι "however, to be sure"
- μεγάλων ἀγαθῶν ἢ κακῶν "great goods and [great] evils" (i.e., great pleasures and great pains)
- Χορηγεῖσθαι "supplies, furnishes"
 - This is an interesting word. It had the literal meaning of furnishing the cost of outfitting and equipping a chorus (χορῶ) at the public festivals. I find this some clever wordplay on Epicurus's part since he started this section by using a term to describe Fortune being introduced or led onto the stage in 133g (εἰσαγομένην < εἰσάγω "leading in, introducing (onto the stage)").
 - "And it [chance] is not the uncertain cause of everything, for one does not think it can grant good or evil for a person's blessed life, however it does furnish the beginning (source, foundation) of great goods and great evils "

Our consolidated literal translation then goes:

Because of this, it is better to follow the stories of the gods than to be enslaved by the deterministic decrees of the old natural philosophers, because necessity is not moved by prayer; and such a one accepts that Fortune is not a god, as the hoi polloi understand (for a god does nothing in a disorderly or haphazardly manner); And it is not the uncertain cause of everything, for one cannot think it can grant good or evil for a person's blessed life; however, it does furnish for oneself the starting point of great goods and great evils,

Verse 135

Bailey: 135. κρείττον εἶναι νομίζει εὐλογίστως ἀτυχεῖν ἢ ἀλογίστως εὐτυχεῖν (βέλτιον γὰρ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι τὸ καλῶς κριθὲν <σφαλῆναι μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ κακῶς κριθὲν> ὀρθωθῆναι διὰ ταύτην).

Ταῦτα οὖν καὶ τὰ τούτοις συγγενῇ μελέτα πρὸς σεαυτὸν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς πρὸς <τε> τὸν ὅμοιον σεαυτῷ, καὶ οὐδέποτε οὐθ' ὕπαρ οὐτ' ὄναρ διαταραχθήσῃ, ζήσεις δὲ ὡς θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις. οὐθὲν γὰρ ἔοικε θνητῷ ζῶν ζῶν ἄνθρωπος ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς.

135a. κρείττον εἶναι νομίζει εὐλογίστως ἀτυχεῖν ἢ ἀλογίστως εὐτυχεῖν

- "believing that it is better to be unfortunate rationally/ prudently/ wisely than fortunate foolishly/ thoughtlessly /irrationally"
 - Ἀτυχεῖν "to be unfortunate literally ἀ "not" + τυχεῖν from τύχης "Fortune"
 - Εὐτυχεῖν "to be prosperous, fortunate" using the eu- "well, good" prefix before τυχεῖν
 - Εὐλογίστως < εὐ (eu-) "well" + λογίστως (logistos) "reasoned"
 - Ἀλογίστως < ἀ "not" + λογίστως "reasoned"
- This is all some clever wordplay on Epicurus's part again. Consider the parallel constructions here, swapping the prefixes among the four words:
 - εὐλογίστως vs. ἀλογίστως
 - ἀτυχεῖν vs. εὐτυχεῖν

135b. (βέλτιον γὰρ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι τὸ καλῶς κριθὲν <σφαλῆναι μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ κακῶς κριθὲν> ὀρθωθῆναι διὰ ταύτην).

- βέλτιον γὰρ "because it is better..."
 - comparative degree of ἀγαθός (agathós) "good," i.e., "better"
 - I find it interesting that now Epicurus uses βέλτιον and not κρείττον. This may argue for seeing κρείττον as conveying "more powerful or intense" rather than simply "better." Here in 135b, it may be "better" in the sense of "more of a good thing."
- ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι τὸ καλῶς κριθὲν
 - ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι "in the actions, accomplishments, doings"
 - κριθὲν (aorist participle) "having separated, distinguished; decided, judged"
 - "to have been deciding the noble way in accomplishing one's actions" (paraphrase)
- <σφαλῆναι μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ κακῶς κριθὲν>
 - σφαλῆναι (aorist passive infinitive)
 - (passive) to be foiled; to fall, to be cast down (from a figurative or literal elevated place); to stagger, reel
 - μᾶλλον "much better"

- κριθὲν (aorist participle) "having separated, distinguished; decided, judged"
- "than to have been foiled having decided the bad way..."
- ὀρθωθῆναι διὰ ταύτην).
 - "to succeed, to bring to a happy end, to prosper, to flourish; to restore to health and happiness" by means of this.

135c. Ταῦτα οὖν καὶ τὰ τούτοις συγγενῇ μελέτα πρὸς σεαυτὸν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς πρὸς <τε> τὸν ὅμοιον σεαυτῷ,

- Meditate (μελέτα) then on this and similar things with yourself day and night as well as together with those like yourself."
 - ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς literally "day and night" (i.e., all the time)

135d. καὶ οὐδέποτε οὐθ' ὕπαρ οὐτ' ὄναρ διαταραχθήσῃ, ζήσεις δὲ ὡς θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις.

- "And never, neither awake nor in sleep, throw oneself into confusion, and you will live as a god among humans."

135e. οὐθὲν γὰρ ἔοικε θνητῷ ζῶφι ζῶν ἄνθρωπος ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς.

- οὐθὲν γὰρ "because no one ..."
- ἔοικε "to be like; seems..."
- θνητῷ ζῶφι "for a mortal being (living thing)"
 - ζῶφι is the dative form of ζῶν which we met way back in 123 when talking about the gods.
- ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς "in the midst of everlasting good things (pleasure)."
 - ἀθανάτοις (< αθάνατος (athanatos)) means literally a- "un-, not" + thanatos "dying" so immortal and eternal are one sense; however, it also conveys perpetual or everlasting which seems more appropriate in this context.

"Because no person who lives among eternal good things (pleasure) is like a mortal being."

Now, to bring 135, our final verse, all back together:

believing that it is better to be unfortunate rationally than fortunate irrationally because it is better to have been deciding the noble way in accomplishing one's actions and to have been foiled than having decided the bad way and to succeed by means of chance.

Meditate day and night then on this and similar things by yourself as well as together with those like yourself. And never, neither awake nor in sleep, throw yourself into confusion, and you will live as a god among humans; because no person who lives among eternal pleasures is like a mortal being.

Appendix: Alternative translations

Lives of Eminent Philosophers. Diogenes Laertius. R.D. Hicks. (Perseus Digital Library)
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0258%3Abook%3D10%3Achapter%3D1>

Letter to Menoeceus. Epicurus Wiki. http://wiki.epicurism.info/Letter_to_Menoeceus/

Letter to Menoeceus. Peter Saint-Andre. <http://monadnock.net/epicurus/letter.html>

The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers by Diogenes Laërtius, literally translated by C.D. Yonge. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/57342/57342-h/57342-h.htm#Page_424 (Project Gutenberg)

Norman DeWitt translation from *St. Paul and Epicurus* (Appendix)
<http://epicurism.info/etexts/stpaulandepicurus.html#appendix>

Epicurus: The Extant Remains. Cyril Bailey.
https://archive.org/stream/EpicurusTheExtantRemainsBaileyOxford1926_201309/